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The King's Daughters.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE ORPHAN SISTERS."

NEW YORK:
NORMAN L. MUNRO, PUBLISHER,
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1889.

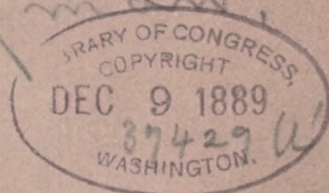


THE
KING'S DAUGHTERS:

OR,

The Heiress and The Outcast.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE ORPHAN SISTERS."



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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

HOW A TRAGEDY BEGAN.

THE sleety February day was drawing to its close. A waning twilight—blear and spectral as a "corpse-light"—glimmered feebly over a world of ice and snow; a dismal, whining blast swept over the frost-locked bosom of the Alleghany, and, dashing up the slope in fitful gusts of hail and sleet, drove through the bare trees of Catheron Park until the gray boughs clashed and rattled, and the snow beneath was scattered with broken twigs.

In the dismal distance the lamps of Pittsburgh glowed fitfully through the sleety dusk, with here and there some tall chimney belching forth a banner of fire, as though in perpetual defiance of the brawling storm that seized and tore it into writhing ribbons of flame.

East or west, north or south, look where she would, the prospect was a gloomy and a cheerless one, and with a faint, low sigh and a perceptible shudder, Inez Catheron dropped the curtain over the dreary picture, and, walking back to the fireplace, leaned her white forehead upon the carven mantel, and stood there long, looking sorrowfully down upon the blazing logs.

In the creed of the world, she, of all women, should have been the last to wear a look of sorrow or feel a pang of regret, for all the blessings that that world had to give to woman had been showered upon her with a lavish hand—youth, beauty, riches in abundance, a husband she loved and who worshiped her in return, a home that was like a

palace and a life that was like a poem—all these were hers, and to them was soon to be added the blessing of maternity—"the joy of wives who truly love their lords."

Looking back upon her life to-night, she could scarcely find a flaw in all its three-and-twenty years, though it is true that she had not always known such abundant wealth as was hers at present, but of happiness there had been no stint from her earliest recollection.

The petted only daughter of an English earl of slender means, who had made many a sacrifice, of which she never knew, in order to surround her life with all that youth desires and love can give—the Lady Inez Glandore had, at the age of twenty, made her *debut* under the chaperonage of her aunt, the Countess of Elsdale, created a decided *furor* by her delicate golden beauty and her natural charm of manner, and despite the well-known fact that she was absolutely dowerless, gave Mayfair "a slight attack of the horrors" by refusing, first a royal duke who was considered the *parti* of the season, then a marquis of fabulous wealth and irreproachable family, and finally shocked society to its very core by giving as the reason of her refusal, that she didn't love either these distinguished suitors, and until she met a man that she did love, she proposed to continue in a state of single blessedness if it were for years to come.

"The silly, romantic creature!" groaned the Countess of Elsdale. "Ten to one she will throw herself away upon some penniless guardsman, and end her days in shabby-genteel extinction! I have no patience with any such Quixotic nonsense, and it will never bring her any adequate reward for the chances she has sacrificed. This tiresome 'all for love' business is another name for social suicide, and Inez is in a fair way to swell the list of victims!"

But in spite of the countess' gloomy prediction, the Lady Inez did not fall in love with a penniless guardsman, and her resolution did not bring her to poverty and want, for in the midst of her "second season out," a great social lion, in the person of a handsome young American millionaire, made his appearance in Mayfair, and at their first meeting, Inez Glandore knew that she had met her fate.

Remarkably handsome and fabulously rich, the sole owner of the Black Diamond and the Great American Coal Mines, with interests in half a dozen railroads and factories, and not a relative to inherit his vast wealth, Kingdon Catheron was well calculated to prove an object of interest to the British mammas, and as bitterly as they had resented Lady Inez's rejection of those eligible *partis*,

they now resented her evident preference for this latest catch.

It was all to no purpose, however. The attachment was mutual, the engagement announced before the season was six weeks older. A grand wedding soon followed, and when Kingdon Catheron returned to America, he took with him a loved and loving wife.

It was just eleven months to-night that Inez Catheron first crossed the threshold of her new home, and even now, as she stood looking down into the glowing fire, she was living that day over again.

What a surprise it was to her, to see those hundreds of miners, with their wives and children, all dressed in gala attire, and cheering as the carriage rolled along. With what wonder she greeted the knowledge that all these were dependent upon her husband for the bread they ate, the roofs which sheltered them, and the clothes they wore.

Partly from his name, and partly from his vast possessions, he had gained the title of "Coal King," which his intimate acquaintances had sportively altered into "King Cole," and all the way, as the carriage drove through those possessions on its journey to the park, it was greeted with shouts and cries of "Long live the king!" "Three cheers for young King Cole!" and then, when one bright-faced little woman had joyously added: "Ay, and three more for his beautiful queen, Lord love her sweet blue eyes!" it seemed to Inez that the lusty cheers which followed must surely have been heard for miles.

From the hour she first came among them, the colliers and their wives adored her, and with just cause; for to her they owed many a comfort never known till then.

It was she who caused their miserable huts to be improved; it was she who came with fruits and wine when their wives or little ones were ill; and her purse was never too empty, nor her time too well filled, to answer the call of the sick or needy at any time.

So they grew to love her, those rude, untutored people, with a love like the steadfast devotion of a dog. The rudest of them doffed his hat, and the most profane checked his curses when she approached; and her power over them was so complete that had not her approaching maternity compelled her to remain at home, a tragedy which darkened many lives might never have been enacted.

For they were all past—those peaceful, happy times. No cheering crowd clustered about the Catheron carriage when her husband drove out these days, and no cries of "Long live the king!" filled the air now. Instead, curses

greeted the bare mention of his name; idle men and starving women and children filled the huts in the mining district; noisy gatherings were held in the ale-houses, and drunken crowds teemed through the streets from dawn to dark, for the Black Diamond and the Great American mines had shut down, and the colliers were out on a strike.

It was the old story of labor and capital—a mere question of two cents more per ton for the coal mined and handled; but two cents more per ton Kingdon Catheron had flatly refused to give, and so it fell out that three weeks before this sleety February night, upon which our story opens, there had been a great mass meeting of colliers, and on the morrow a strike was declared by universal consent.

But this was not the worst of it; for, after vainly trying to reason with Kingdon Catheron, after the committee appointed by the strikers had been repulsed and almost kicked from the door, the men, smarting with indignation and half crazed by drink, had resorted to personal violence.

Only a few nights ago, when he was returning home alone and on foot, Kingdon Catheron had been set upon by half a dozen men, beaten into unconsciousness, and left lying in the road until found there by his own coachman two hours afterward.

In the darkness he had not been able to identify all his assailants; but one—Mark Talford, the husband of that same bright-faced little woman who had first greeted Inez with the title of *queen*—he had recognized beyond question, sworn out a warrant for his arrest upon a charge of “assault with intent to kill,” and this very day had driven over to the courthouse for the purpose of appearing against him at the trial.

And this was why Inez Catheron wore that saddened look; this was why—with all that could make life bright surrounding her—she stood there in the fast-deepening darkness, silent, sad-hearted, alone, and looked sorrowfully down into the glowing fire.

“If King would only temper justice with mercy!” she sighed presently. “If he would only think what Mark Talford’s conviction means for *her*, poor creature!—for her and her baby and its poor old grandmother—I think I could almost find heart to sing to-night I should be so happy. But he will not; I know that.”

For many minutes she stood there, so absorbed in her own gloomy meditations that she did not hear the carriage roll up the drive nor the great front door swing back upon its hinges, and the first she knew of her husband’s return

was when he tiptoed his way across the library and, softly wrapping his arms around her, bent and touched his lips to her hair.

"All alone in the darkness, Inez?" he said, with a laugh. "You look like a ghost standing here in your pretty white velvet gown. Ring for lights, and order dinner, dear; I am almost famished."

"And the trial, King?" ventured Inez, eagerly, as soon as she had complied with his request. "Tell me, has it ended? Have—have they found him guilty?"

"I don't know," he answered, carelessly, as he laid aside his coat and hat, and stood up in the mingled glow of firelight and gaslight—a handsome, dark-eyed, dark-haired man of thirty. "The jury was still out when I left the courthouse, and I am going back after dinner to learn the verdict. It will be 'guilty,' of course, and I shall use every endeavor to secure him the full punishment for his offense."

"Oh, don't, King—for my sake, dont!" she pleaded tearfully. "The man is sorry for what he has done—he has sent you word of his penitence, and begged you to remember his poor old mother and his wife and child. Darling, let me counsel and advise you in this. Be lenient with Mark Talford, use your influence to save and not to crush him, King; and by one act of mercy to this poor man, win the respect of his fellows. Be reasonable, be charitable, King. We have so much, dear, that we will not miss the extra two cents per ton, while to them it means some little luxury to brighten their dreary and unlovely homes."

"Yes, and to buy them more whisky, the scoundrels," he answered, angrily. "It is not the money but the principal of the thing, I study, Inez, and I have told you over and over again that I will not yield one jot, and I will not allow a pack of savage brutes to command me. When I have conquered them I will pay the extra amount freely—although they shall not know of my intention until after the strike is ended. But until they come to their senses and proclaim their willingness to resume work at the old rates, I will not grant them one copper more, nor yet consent to talk with their committeemen. They need an example to teach them how little of that 'putty element' there is in my character. And as for this rascal, Talford——"

He did not finish the sentence. The sound of something tapping at the window pane had drawn his wife's attention to the casement while he was speaking. She had hurried to it and divided the velvet curtains, and now

her cry of sorrowful amazement broke in and checked his words.

Outside upon the snowy balcony, a child pressed to her bosom, a shawl thrown over her head, and some straggling tresses of her long light hair lashing her face as the sleety wind beat and buffeted her shivering, thinly clad body—there, with her wild, white face pressed against the glass, and the light from within bringing out her small, slight figure in bold relief against the darkness without, hunger and despair stamped upon every feature, suffering and desolation looking out of her great gray eyes—there in the night and the storm, crouched the figure of a woman—Mark Talford's wife!

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE NIGHT FELL.

WITHOUT an instant's hesitation, Inez threw up the sash and drew the poor benumbed creature into the warmth and radiance of the scented, luxurious room, and, with a word of tender sympathy, led her toward a deep, soft seat beside the fire.

But with a cry of desolation and despair, Maggie Talford broke away from the gentle hand that rested like a white-wood blossom upon her arm, and staggering forward to him, dropped on her knees at his very feet, and putting her little one down beside her, clasped its baby hands, and so lifted up her white, despairing face to Kingdon Catheron's own.

"Pray to him, baby, pray for the poor father's sake!" she cried out in a broken, desolate voice. "Oh, sir! oh, Mr. Catheron, save my man—save granny. Save us! for God's sake do it, sir. It's us you're sacrificing, it's us as'll suffer the most, and we never harmed ye, sir. Oh, mercy, Mr. Catheron—mercy in the Almighty's name. He didn't know what he was a-doing—my poor man didn't. It was the liquor as got into his head—the liquor and the thought o' us a-starvin' like rats in a hole, and then—then others drove him on till he never knowed what he was a-doin', nor—nor—nuthin'. He'd a-died sooner than lay a hand on you after the ways you and your dear lady treated us when poor granny was sick. He didn't want to join the strikers in the first place, but they made him do it, and now— It was the liquor as done the work, not him, sir. Oh, don't 'send him up,' Mr. Catheron, for the dear Lord's sake, don't!"

She had poured forth this wild, disjointed appeal before Catheron could check her, and now as her wretched voice gave out, and short hysterical sobs shook her bosom and

fluttered on her blue lips, she lifted those streaming eyes again and held forth her hands in a voiceless prayer for pity.

Not naturally a hard man, but one whose besetting sin was a stubborn fealty to his word when once pledged, and an iron resolution to carry it out, cost what it would, Kingdon Catheron averted his eyes from the face of the distracted creature who knelt before him, and in his secret heart wished he had not been so hasty or that she instead of one of his fellow-strikers had been chosen to bear to him that first message of Mark Talford's penitence.

"I pity you from the bottom of my heart, Maggie," he said, "but the matter has passed out of my hands now, and it is too late for me to do what you wish, even if I would."

"Oh, don't say that, for God's sake don't say that!" broke forth the distracted woman with a scream of heart-broken despair. "It's only your word as has shut the bars upon him, and you're powerful enough to swing 'em back if you only wish. I've been a-standin' over there at the courthouse ever since the door opened this mornin'. I'd a little hope then that I'd see you afore you went in to swear agin him, and maybe you'd not be hard on my man for the sake o' baby and me; but now it——"

A cry of abject misery wrenched away her voice, she crawled forward on her knees, beating her bosom and her temples with her poor, half-frozen hands, and so cried out anew with the horror and despair of her tortured heart:

"Now they say as it's goin' ag'in him, Mr. Catheron. They say at the courthouse that the verdict is sure to be 'Guilty'; they say as he'll get five years in the Western Penitentiary. My God! *five years*, sir; and what's to become of *us*?"

"Do you think I will see you suffer? Your comfort will be looked after—far better than he looked after it, the rascal! But I tell you I am determined to make an example of this cowardly dog, who attacks a man in the dark; and while he learns a lesson in obedience, you shall not suffer, be assured. You and your mother-in-law may move into the new cottage on the hill to-morrow, and I——"

"I don't want the new cottage—I want my man!" she broke in, distractedly. "It's not the house as makes *home*; it's him and baby. The old house is as good as a palace, if only Mark is there; and if he isn't—there's nuthin' left me but to take down his gun and send a bullet through the heart you've broken!"

A faint, womanly gasp of terror from his wife's lips drew Catheron's attention to her. He saw that she was

pale, weak, and overcome; and springing to the bell-rope, he rang for assistance.

"Oh, mercy, sir, mercy!" screamed Maggie Talford, fearing from this that he meant to have her put out. "Plead for us, Mrs. Catheron—you as was always the friend of the poor. Plead for my man and me, and maybe——"

"Be still, you idiot!" broke in Catheron, sharply, all his thoughts centered upon his wife, and the knowledge that she suffered through *her* outburst hardening him against the miserable creature who knelt there with her trembling hands outstretched. "Can't you see that you are distressing Mrs. Catheron? Have you no sense, no reason, to shock her like this? Here, Martha"—as a trim housemaid appeared in answer to his summons—"assist your mistress to her room without delay, and remain with her until I come up."

"Oh, King, I prefer——"

"Hush! I insist that you retire at once, Inez. You shall not listen to any more of this woman's raving madness. Go! it is my wish."

And, as his wishes were her law, sorrowfully bowing her beautiful golden head, and leaning heavily upon Martha's arm, Inez Catheron sighed helplessly and walked out of the room.

For a minute her husband stood at the doorway and anxiously watched her as she mounted the stairs; then, as she passed from sight on the landing above, he turned, and with an impatient gesture, again confronted the striker's wife and child, and whatever feeling of compassion their misery had evoked before, it was lost now in the knowledge that to them he owed even that one small pang which had smitten his idolized wife.

"I have done the best that I can do," he said, bitterly. "I have offered to look after you and your child—I have even offered to assist his mother—and you have chosen to throw the offer back in my face. I am sorry for you, but I can do no more. The law has taken hold of your rascally husband, and he richly deserves all that he gets.

"As for me, I tell you now—once and for all, Maggie—I will not lift one finger to lighten his sentence, or take one step toward saving him, let it cost what it will!"

With such a scream as only a heart-broken woman could give, Maggie Talford crawled to him and wound her arms about his knees.

"Don't say it—for God's sake, don't say it!" she panted, shivering and lifting her dilated eyes, with something in her look and bearing that was horribly suggestive of a wounded animal when it hears the baying of the hounds.

"You don't mean it, Mr. Catheron, you can't mean it; you're only speaking in anger because o' your dear lady's sufferin's.

"Oh, but they're nuthin' to mine—nuthin' to mine! She ain't felt her little one a-clingin' round her neck yet, she ain't heered it cryin' for food and callin' for the father as has been took away from it!

"Oh, Mr. Catheron, for the good Lord's sake, don't do this dreadful thing!

"Forgive my man—forgive him as you hope that Heaven'll forgive you in your time o' need, and for the sake o' the little one as is a-comin' into your own life, spare the father o' mine!"

"I have done the best I can," he answered huskily. "It is useless to plead—I will do no more!"

"No, no, no! Don't say that—take it back, sir, for God's sake take it back!" she screamed, winding her clinging arms yet tighter about his knees, and looking up with the wildness of incipient madness in her glaring eyes. "You won't have the heart to kill us like this! We'll die if you take Mark from us, and—and—— My Heaven, I'm afraid I'm dying now, Mr. Catheron—dyin' and a-burnin' up like the souls of them as is lost. It's all flame in my head and heart. I—I can hardly see your face, but I can hear ye. Oh, God! but I can hear ye. Take back your words. I'll cling to you and hold you till you do, sir! Save my man from the prison, give him back to granny and baby and me. Please, Mr. Catheron—please, please, please!"

For all answer, he gently but firmly disengaged himself from the clasp of her arms, and rang for the footman to show her to the door; and then, with a gesture of repudiation, walked out and left her alone.

And she? With one shrill scream that echoed through the house like the shriek of a banshee calling forth a soul, she flung herself face downward upon the floor, and after that lay quite still and uttered neither prayer nor cry to the very end.

The footman came in and gently tapped her shoulder. She rose mechanically, like one dazed and stupefied by some heavy shock, and catching up the shawl which had fallen from her shoulders, tottered to the fireplace, where her child had crawled, and sat crooning before the blazing logs.

"Dada," it crowed, as it lifted its glowing face to hers, "dada, mammy, dada."

She caught it up almost fiercely and hushed its voice in the folds of her shawl; then, with her long, light hair tumbled upon her shoulders, and the child held close to

her bosom, she tottered out of the room, out of the house, and five minutes later Inez Catheron, standing in the window of her own scented, satin-hung boudoir, and looking sadly out upon the sleety, February darkness, saw her pass under the blinking lamps that crowned the gateway, and then melt out in the darkness as though the night and the storm had taken her and swept her onward at their will.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE DAY BROKE.

It was half-past seven by the buhl clock on his wife's dressing-table when Kingdon Catheron walked into Inez's boudoir, and found her standing in the window with outstretched hands dividing the silken curtains, her white velvet gown falling away from her in long, straight folds, like the carven drapery of a marble statue, and her pale, sad face yet turned toward the lamp-crowned gateway, where she had seen that tottering figure last.

Dinner was over, and for the first time in the one sweet year of their wedded life Kingdon Catheron had dined alone. Martha had brought him word that her mistress "was not feeling well and would not come down, if he would kindly excuse her this evening," and he, remembering the shock she had experienced, as well as the delicate state of her health, had ordered her dinner sent up, with the word that she was to study only her own pleasure, and not to waste one thought upon his.

From the character of the message she had sent him, he had thought to find her already abed, or at the least reclining among the soft cushions of her favorite divan; but instead he found her dinner spread out upon the table still untouched, found her still standing in the window, still robed in her sumptuous velvet "dinner-dress," while on a chair beside her lay, unheeded, her slippers and the silk *negligee* which Martha had placed ready for her hand.

She heard his footstep as he entered, but before he could speak, turned slowly, and lifted to his a face so white and drawn with terror and sadness, that he stopped short with a sudden gasp, and stared at her in painful surprise.

But in the next moment he was by her side, and his tender arms enfolded her.

"Inez!" he exclaimed in a startled voice, "how strange you look! how changed you are. Dear wife, what is it?"

"I do not know," she answered, faintly. "Something seems to weigh so heavily upon my heart that it sickens and oppresses me. It came upon me first when I saw that

poor creature pass through the gateway, and it seemed to rivet me there."

"Good Heaven! and have you been standing in the window ever since she went?"

"Yes; is it long?"—in a half-bewildered surprise.

"An hour and a half," he answered. "She left at six, and it is now half-past seven. I have ordered the carriage to take me over to the courthouse, and I thought I would step in and see if you were better before I went, and now——"

Her fluttering white hands closed nervously upon his arm as she spoke, and her eyes lifted to his, with a flash of sudden terror.

"Don't go, King," she interrupted in a palpitating voice. "Don't go over to hear the verdict to-night. Something seems to tell me that you had better not, my darling."

"But, sweetheart, I promised to stop on the way and take Judge Barkley over in the carriage, and really there is not the slightest danger. Those rascals have learned by this time that I am not to be assaulted with impunity, and it wouldn't do to let them think that I am afraid of them."

"But please don't go to the courthouse to-night, King," she persisted; "the strikers will be gathered there in force to hear the verdict of the jury, and if it should be 'guilty'——"

"It can hardly be anything else, Inez."

"Then don't go, for my sake, King! Call me weak, fanciful, what you will, but in the moment I saw Maggie Talford pass under that gate, as plainly as I now hear my own voice, I heard that of my poor dead mother call out to me, and say: 'Keep him home, Inez, keep him home! There's danger.'"

For a moment Kingdon Catheron wavered. He knew what would be the universal opinion—he knew that the men would say he had not dared to venture forth for fear of punishment at the hands of Mark Talford's upholders, and with not so much as one drop of a coward's blood in his veins, he naturally shrunk from being judged a poltroon!

But to resist the pleading of this loved and lovely woman, whose arms infolded him, whose life was wrapped up in his, and to resist at such a time as this, when she had every claim upon his protection, and every right to ask and to receive the foremost place in his consideration. Ah! he had scarcely loved her could he say her nay.

"There, quiet your fears, dearest," he said with a sigh.

"It costs me a struggle to say it, but—you shall—have your way."

"And you won't go to the courthouse to-night?" joyously.

"No, I won't even cross the river at all," he answered. "But I *must* let Judge Barkley know of my decision, and as I have certain matters I wish to talk over with him, I'll pay him a visit and be back here with you before nine o'clock. I'll tell Donald to take the carriage back to the stable and saddle Rocket instead. It's only a bit of a ride from here to Judge Barkley's, and you won't mind me taking that trip, I am sure."

"No," she answered, a trifle hesitatingly, then, as she remembered what it cost him to gratify her first desire, and for the sake of humoring her, be branded with cowardice:

"No, I shall not mind that, King," she added more brightly. "You are very good, dear, to deal so kindly with my poor, foolish fancies, so I will ring myself and order Rocket to be saddled at once."

Then opening her arms and watching him with loving glances as he stalked away to prepare himself for the ride, she turned to the bell, rung for a servant, and gave the promised order.

Twenty minutes later, when Martha came up to announce that the horse was at the door, she found her master booted and spurred, standing in the center of the pretty silken boudoir, with his arms folded about his wife, and looking, as she afterward declared in confidence to the cook, "for all the world as though they were only lovers, and wasn't sensible married folks at all!"

"Good-bye for a little time, my darling!" he smiled, as he bent and kissed her. "I sha'n't be gone more than an hour, so you may expect me back by nine at the latest."

"Good-bye, King—*my* King!" she sweetly answered as she smiled up into his face; then, obeying a sudden impulse, she drew down his head, kissed his eyes, and lips, and hair, and then, rosy with blushes, dropped her arms and let him go.

He caught up his sealskin hat and crushed it down upon his dark, wavy hair as he darted out of the room and went down the stairs, humming snatches of a popular song, and for half a minute his wife stood by the open doorway, listening to his clanking spurs, and the murmured sweetness of his melodious voice; then, with a faint, low sigh, she walked back to the window and stood there, watching him ride away through the stormy winter night.

"My darling, my handsome, gallant King!" she murmured, with a rush of tears and a feeling of pride in her wifeness to *him*. "Oh, I can understand the sufferings

of that poor creature who was here to-night, for if any one took *you* from *me*, my darling, I should not wish to live."

Her soft, sweet voice quivered tenderly as she uttered that, and pressing her face to the ice-cold pane, she vainly tried to catch one more glimpse of him as he rode away.

But only the writhing tree-tops and the driving sleet were visible in the faint light of the gate-lamp, and with a sigh of regret she drew the curtains and turned away from the window.

"What a wretched night," she murmured with a shudder as the wind howled down the chimney and the sleet clattered against the casement. "How shall I pass the time until King returns? Somehow, I wish he had not gone at all. He might better have sent one of the servants to bear his message to the judge. I would have suggested that, only that I had already forced him to humor me at the cost of his pride, and I hated to ask too much. Ugh! how the storm drives. I wonder"—hopefully this—"if I have outgrown all my childish fire-fancies, or if the spell would work to-night? I used to turn out the lights and sit building castles in the fire whenever the winter nights were stormy at home, and it always soothed and amused me when time hung heavily and I had nothing to do but wait. Maybe the old charm lingers still, and it will help me wear away the tedious hour which must pass before King returns. At all events it can do no harm to try."

Speaking, she walked to the crystal chandelier and shut off its gleaming jets one by one, until only the fire, glowing like a gigantic ruby set in the silver bars of the grate shed its red luster through the scented darkness, and changed the silver ferns on the frescoed ceiling to sprays of copper-gold.

She wheeled a great, sleepy, hollow chair to the fireplace, and sinking gently into its violet velvet depths, folded her slim, white hands, and resting her cheek against the cushioned back of the chair, turned her face to the redly-gleaming coals.

Yes; the old charm lingered still, she told herself, as one by one familiar faces peeped from the coals and familiar scenes came trooping back; and with a smile of sweet content, she lay and let the fancies link themselves one in one, and bring the past before her.

The red light drenched her face and hair, and steeped her white velvet robe in a glow of splendor; the warmth of the fire and the softness of the velvet cushions lulled her insensibly; the pictures in the coals began to float and mingle in a sweet confusion; the white lids fluttered down and veiled her tired eyes; and when, not quite a half hour

after Kingdon Catheron had gone, Martha stole into the boudoir to speak with her mistress, she found her lying fast asleep in the deep, soft chair, with the crimson light aflame on her peaceful face.

"Poor dear, she's clean tired out, muttered the girl. "I'll go back and spend the evening in the kitchen with cook, and when missus wants me she can ring."

Then tiptoeing her way out of the room, she closed the door, and left that silent sleeper alone with her peaceful dreams.

And so the time sped, unheeded and unknown, over Inez Catheron's head. The fire burned gray, and the shadows deepened about her; the clock struck nine, then ten, then eleven, but no one came to disturb her. So the last peaceful hours of her young life glided by, and vanished, even as the firelight's gleam had vanished from her beautiful sleeping face.

* * * * *

Twelve pealed forth from the buhl toy on the mantelpiece, and, with a little cry of surprise, Inez Catheron started from her slumbers and looked about her.

The fire had burned down to a heap of gray ashes, the room was cold and pitchy dark; but it was neither the darkness, nor the coldness, nor yet the chiming of the clock which had recalled her from her slumbers.

It was a scream—real or fancied, she knew not which—but a woman's scream, far off in the distance, followed by a burst of goblin laughter; and springing to her feet, nervous and trembling with terror, Inez touched a match to the gas, and then glanced wildly at the clock.

"Midnight!" she gasped, appalled; "midnight, and I have been sleeping here since eight o'clock. Just Heaven! has not King returned yet? And if he has, why have I been suffered to sleep so long?"

She rushed to the bell-rope as she spoke, and frantically rang for a servant.

In half a minute's time, Martha, startled out of her wits by this violent summons, came tearing up the stairs and burst into the room.

"Oh, my dear missus," she began, "whatever is the mat——"

"Your master—Mr. Catheron," broke in Inez, excitedly. "Speak quickly, has he returned?"

"No, ma'am!" answered Martha, shaking her head. "I heered him tell Donald at dinner time that he wouldn't be home until werry late, ma'am, as he was goin' over to Pittsburg."

"But he didn't go—he didn't go!" exclaimed Inez, with a wail of agonized despair. "He changed his mind and

promised me to be at home at nine o'clock—at nine, do you hear?—and now it is midnight!

“Oh, my heart—my heart! Something has happened, I know it has. The strikers have waylaid him, and he—

“Call up the servants—send them out to search for him. He only went to visit Judge Barkley—he promised me faithfully that he would not cross the river, and now —

“Oh, King, my husband, my darling, where are you at this dreadful hour?”

Shocked and suprised by this unexpected intelligence, as well as by the distracted manner of her mistress, Martha rushed out of the room and ran down the stairs, calling to her fellow-servants and bringing them flocking up the stairs like a drove of frightened sheep.

“The master!” she gasped. “He promised to be back at *nine*, and the strikers are out, and——”

“The Lord have mercy on us! What's that?”

It was a woman's shriek, then a burst of maniacal laughter, ringing from the park and blending with the hoarse voices of men; and almost paralyzed with terror, the servants huddled together and looked unutterable things.

A footstep scurried up the drive and up the steps, and another burst of that awful laughter rang forth; and almost at the same instant some one seized the door-bell and sent peal after peal ringing down the silent hall.

The female servants gasped and clung to each other in pale affright; the men with one accord looked at each other, and then rushed to obey that violent summons. The door was seized and wrenched open, and the sight which stood revealed by that simple act was remembered for years afterward by those who beheld it.

Midway in the drive, a crowd of pale-faced men were moving slowly toward the house, bearing between them a rude litter upon which lay a dark and shapeless something hidden under a pile of coats, and behind it, in the grasp of two men, whose torches spluttered in the wind, and shed a ghastly light upon the whole grewsome procession, followed a laughing, shrieking, demented woman with an old rusty musket in her hands.

It was Maggie Talford, screaming and gestulating as only a maniac could.

“The master! the master! for God's sake don't say it's him!” shrieked Martha, rushing down the steps as the men set down their burden; but even as she spoke a gentle hand lifted the bundle of coats and let the torchlight fall upon the dreadful thing beneath.

A scream of horrified recognition went up from all the servants; for there, with his glaring eyes upturned, and

the blood oozing from a bullet hole in his temple, there, stark dead, and frozen stiff, lay the body of Kingdon Catheron.

"Look at him—look at him!" shrieked Maggie Talford, with a burst of goblin laughter. "He's gone to join my man, and I sent him there. I sent him wi' a curse on his hard heart. Blood—all blood! and so white and clean afore. He'd done his best, he said. Ha! ha! ha! an' I done my best to pay him for ruinin' my man!"

A cry of horrified amazement rolled up from the lips of the servants at the maniac's terrible self-denunciation, but over it there arose another and a wilder cry, as a white figure dashed through the doorway and sped down the snowy steps.

In that moment of horror the servants had forgotten their mistress until it was too late to avert the dreadful end.

"King! King! my love, my husband!" she shrieked as she threw herself across his body and wound her arms about him. "Speak to me, darling! Are you badly hurt? It is I—Inez—your wife and your— *Blood!* look at it. Blood. He is dead! My God, he is dead!"

And then she sunk into a merciful oblivion.

Strong arms lifted her and bore her to her bed-chamber, doctor and nurse were sent for in post haste, and when the first rays of the morning began to peep through the eastern sky, Kingdon Catheron's twin daughters lay sleeping beside their stricken mother in the wide West chamber of Catheron Park.

CHAPTER IV.

"A MONSTER, SIRE, THAT CRACKS DEAD MEN'S BONES."

THE night had shut in again, wilder and stormier than the day before.

In the bare and cheerless cabin, where no child's prattle sounded to-night, and where a few sticks blazing in the black fireplace shed a faint, flickering light over her bowed head, Mark Talford's mother crouched upon the hearthstone with her dreary face turned downward to the feeble flames, her brown, claw-like hands moving ceaselessly one through the other, and her gaunt figure swaying to and fro, as though rocked by a tempest more violent than the one that shrieked without.

A large, bony woman, with a hard, masculine face, dark and wrinkled as a walnut-shell; a thin, straight mouth, crowded with irregular teeth; a narrow, retreating forehead, overhung by a frowsy mass of iron-gray hair; a large, flat nose; and a pair of small, preternaturally brill-

iant eyes, deep-set under shaggy brows; square of chin and massive of jaw and cheekbone—that was Hulda Talford's face as the wavering firelight revealed it.

All day she had been crouching as she crouched now, mumbling curses in a dull, spluttering voice—curses on the hand that had stricken her, on the Power that permitted it, and on the heads of those who deserted her in her time of trouble and despair.

For popular sentiment had undergone a serious shock since the tragedy, and, as is always the case with the ignorant, the very men who had upheld Mark Talford yesterday, now bitterly cursed him as the primary cause of the distress they foresaw threatening themselves through a winter of enforced idleness, and put not him alone, but all connected with him, under a ban of sullen displeasure.

So, in their wrath and despair, they turned their backs upon Mark Talford's mother after they brought her the news of the tragedy, and from that hour to this no one had crossed the threshold of her desolate home, and no voice but her own had sounded between its barren walls since yesterday.

Everything was gone from her, even the child, whom the authorities had consented to take in charge, because it cried so piteously for its mother, and had borne away with them to the prison where that mother lay, and where it was at least sure of food and warmth until such time as it should be legally consigned to the charge of the county. The verdict of the jury which sat in judgment upon her son's offense had doomed him to three years' hard labor in the Western Penitentiary at Allegheny City, and long before this hour to-morrow he would have begun the service of his time; and she, his mother, homeless and penniless in her old age, would be cast adrift upon the world without a friend or a hope.

"A curse on Kingdon Catheron! a curse on his children and all that belongs to 'em!" she cried out in a dull, malignant voice of wrathful despair, as she rocked to and fro in the firelight, and gripped her long hands like the talons of some ravenous bird fastening upon its prey. "The curse of the widowed and the orphaned follow 'em to their graves, as it'll follow the father as never lived to see their faces! A curse on everything they touch, and every dollar as comes to them! If I could live to see 'em as desolate as he has made me and mine, if I could live to see 'em 'a charge on the county,' like the child o' my boy, I'd sell my soul to the devil and go down to him laughing wi' happiness!"

The wind roared down the wide-throated chimney-place as she ceased speaking, and made the dying fire leap and

blaze fitfully before it expired. She rose to her feet as the last flame ceased to quiver among the red embers, and striking her hands together with a cry of angry despair, trudged up and down the bleak, fast darkening room.

"No more wood! no more bread! no more *anything!*" she said, in a low, half-wailing, half-growling voice. "Even the fire has gone from me now as though he'd come back to quench it in his dead hands, and take that from me as he's took all else!"

For several minutes she paced up and down the room muttering curses upon the twin-heiresses at the Park, her bitter, resentful nature forgetting all the kindness of Inez Catheron in the memory of the suffering which had come to her through the stubbornness of Inez Catheron's husband; then, as some darker thought took shape in her mind, she stopped abruptly with a fierce, snarling cry, and stood dead still looking straight before her with a bitterly jubilant expression stamped upon her tawny face.

"Wait a bit," she said, presently, in an eager voice, as she went over to the fireplace and rested her forehead upon the wooden mantel. "Yes, it could be done—ay, and a just punishment it would be, too, for what he done agin me and mine. But wait a bit, till I think it over. I don't see the way clear as yet, and there's danger in it if I fail."

Her voice sunk and died out, and for many minutes she stood there, resting her forehead against the mantel, and staring silently at the red sparks on the hearth; then, with a sudden exclamation, she started up, and groping her way to a closet, she fumbled about its shelves in quest of something.

"Where's that stuff as the doctor gimme when he set my broken leg?" she muttered. "It made my head seem full o' whirlin' fire when I smelled it, but arter that I didn't know nuthin' nor felt nuthin' till I woke up in the morning and found the job done. The bottle was here t'other day, for I seed it myself; and now—— Here it is—here it is, at last!"

Her large, bony hands gripped over a bottle which she had touched while speaking, and hurrying back to the fireplace with her prize, she tore off a strip of her gingham apron, threw it upon the embers, and blew them with her breath until the rag ignited.

Bending forward, she held up the bottle and scrutinized it by the light of that feeble blaze.

"Yes, this is it," she said, in a satisfied whisper. "It's half full yet, and there's more than enough. Send my son to the penitentiary, will you, Kingdon Catheron? Break his woman's heart, and throw his child upon the county,

will you? Well, turn about is fair play, the whole world over, and I'll pay back what I've had in the same coin as I got it. It's a queer road that leads nowheres, curse ye! and the one you chose has led to this."

A low guttural laugh jarred the stillness of the room as she uttered these words; then thrusting the bottle into her pocket, she groped her way back to the closet, fumbled about until she found an old table-knife, pocketed this also, and taking down a rusty cloak and a worsted hood from the peg where they hung beside the closet door, began with eager haste to don them.

"I warn't born o' Romany blood to forgive an injury, or forget how to repay it," she chuckled, as she tied on her worsted hood, and nodded confidentially to the dingy fire. "It's eight-and-twenty years since I left my own land, and said good-bye to my tribe, but I aren't forgot how a gypsy takes revenge for a wrong, and pays it back, heart for heart and blow for blow!"

She wound her cloak about her shoulders, wrenched open the door of her cabin, closed it behind her, and stepping forth into the driving sleet and shrieking wind, hurried away through the darkness in the direction of Catheron Park.

The belfry clock struck nine before she had covered more than half the distance to the Park, for in such a storm, and upon such a road, it was impossible to progress rapidly, and she was already blue, and half benumbed by the bitter, biting air, but still she kept her purpose uppermost in her mind, still she blundered on, until with a cry of satisfaction she saw the gate-lamps of Catheron Park shining out through the windy darkness before her.

She staggered up to them and crept into the grounds, resting under the shadow of the wall and blowing her breath upon her stiffened fingers until she had infused some warmth into them, then creeping into the shadow of the rocking trees that rattled their storm-driven boughs above the drive, moved swiftly and noiselessly in the direction of the house.

There it stood, a dark, forbidding pile under a dark, forbidding sky, no lights agleam in the many windows that looked out like scowling, sullen eyes from its stormy, storm-swept face, but some faint gleam streaming over the swaying trees that stood behind it, mutely telling that life as well as death yet reigned under the cover of its gloomy roof.

"They're all in the rear, and I'm sorry for it!" muttered Hulda Talford as she crept along. "The balconies is in the rear, too, and that's my only way o' gittin' in. I

thought mayhaps she'd be lyin' in the room above the front door, where I've seen her sittin' in the bay winder so many times when I passed the gates. But mebbly that's only one of them sittin'-rooms as high folks calls 'bood-wars' in the old country, and her bedroom's in the back of the house where the lights is."

She was correct in that surmise, for, having passed around to the rear of the mansion, she saw that the lights were not confined to the kitchens—where, even then, the servants were holding solemn conclave among themselves—but that a faint, subdued glow, like the dim burning of a night-lamp in a sick-chamber, was visible in the windows of a room communicating with the upper balcony.

There were two of these balconies—the lower giving access to the library windows where last night Maggie Talford had entered to make that final appeal for Kingdon Catheron's mercy, the upper one encircling the entire building, and being accessible from the windows of every room on the second story, and over both of these balconies—even running up, until in certain places it reached the roof and wrapped its tendrils about the gilded rail of turret and tower—wound and re-wound an immense wistaria vine loaded with icicles.

A glance assured the woman that, in its present dangerous condition, it was useless to think of employing that as a means of reaching the upper balcony, and softly tiptoeing up the steps to the lower one, she crept to the window of the library.

Drawing the old knife from her pocket, she slid its blade into the crevice where the upper and the lower sashes met, slid back the catch gently, opened the window, and climbed into the room.

CHAPTER V.

"BORN BUT FOR EVIL, AND IN EVIL LOST."

DARKNESS and the stillness of death reigned everywhere as she issued from behind the curtains, and drawing them over the open window, groped her way along the wall in search of the door. Her feet sunk soundlessly into the heavy pile of the Turkish carpet—she moved on like a spirit or a shadow—found the door, opened it cautiously, and stood in the broad, luxurious hall. The newel lamp, turned low and burning like a cluster of small blue stars above the head of the bronze warrior that supported it, shed a faint light over the passage and guided her to the staircase—such a staircase as she had never seen before, with its line of glittering, gold-framed paintings on one side, its massive agate baluster upon the other, and

between the two a thick, soft carpet like a pathway of moss scattered with trailing flowers.

"Curse him again—and double curse his brats!" she wheezed as she paused and surveyed her luxurious surroundings. "I dare say that any one o' them thar painted gimcracks would a-kep' us for a year, and wi' all this about him he refused the colliers an extra two cents a ton and left us all to starve. If I knowed where his body lay I'd go and say a curse above it—a curse as bitter as he fetched to me and mine. If the dead can see what's goin' on on earth, I hope he's lookin' on me to-night and knows how I'm evenin' up Mark Talford's score!"

Then planting her foot upon the lower step of the staircase, she gripped the baluster and went swiftly and soundlessly up to the floor above.

The light faintly shining from beneath the door told her which was the sick-chamber, but passing by it, she entered a room on the left of the passage, closed and locked the door upon the inside, and crossing to the window, which gave access to the balcony, opened it softly and stepped out again into the night and the storm.

Resting her hand against the wall of the house to steady herself against the violent wind, she crept onward, reached the windows of the sick-room, and sinking on her knees, peered in between the half-parted curtains.

There on the great carved and silk-hung bedstead, Inez, Lady Catheron, lay—a ghost of her own beautiful self, with her mournful eyes fixed upon the ceiling, the light aslant on her pale, spiritless face, and one arm softly in-folding a sleeping child, whose little head lay close to its mother's breast.

A fire was burning in the silver grate and shedding its ruddy gleam over the nurse, who swayed to and fro in a deep, soft rocker, and crooned to the other child, as she hushed it to sleep against her bosom; and the sight of those two tenderly nurtured infants lying there in the very lap of luxury, while her grandchild slept in the city jail, waiting to become a charge on the county, awoke in Hulda Talford's bitter, resentful soul a storm of malicious spite which drove her to redoubled curses, and filled her with a wild longing to dash in and strangle the hated innocents.

"Not yet—not yet, ye fool!" she apostrophized herself, as her hand involuntarily lifted to smash the glass. "There's a bitterer vengeance than death, there's a worse way o' squarin' the account than by killin' the brats, and we'll bide our time, Hulda, till the women are asleep, and we can strike for Mark and his little one."

A look of almost fiendish exultation swept over her face

as she uttered this; she shook her fist at the window, laughed a slow, soundless laugh as she crept back through the storm to the room she had just left, and climbing in closed the window, and curled herself up in the warm darkness to wait for the time to strike.

Thrice in the hour that followed she repeated her journey to Inez Catheron's window to look in upon that picture, and thrice came back; for, as though some warning spirit spoke to the mother's heart, her eyes still remained sleepless, and her arm still encircled the child that lay against her bosom, even though its twin sister, and the nurse who guarded it, lay sleeping together on a cot beside the carven bedstead, and the lights had been turned low in order to woo slumber to the sufferer's tortured brain.

But even the heart's agony cannot forever defy the laws of nature, and so it fell out that, when Hulda Talford made her fourth visit to the window of the sick-room, she found that there was no longer any wakeful eyes to dread, for with her beautiful, sorrowful face turned to the child she held, Inez, Lady Catheron, calmly and sweetly slept.

"I've bided my time, and it's come at last," muttered the woman, with a look of vindictive delight as she once more produced the old knife and attacked the catch of this window, as she had so successfully attacked the one below. "It's after eleven o'clock; I heerd the servants go to bed half an hour ago, and all's ready to my hand now. I want those brats—both on 'em, and I'll have 'em if I'm jugged for it afterward.

"There, the catch is back at last, and now, if you can see, Kingdon Catheron, I pray wi' all my strength that your dead eyes are watchin' this!"

Gently, and without the faintest sound, the window was lifted as she stepped into the room, drawing the curtains together to shut out the draught lest it awaken either of the women before her plans could be carried out; then, sinking down upon her hands and knees, she crawled along the floor in the direction of the nurse's cot.

For a moment she crouched there utterly motionless—scarcely breathing—then her hand slid to her pocket, she took out the vial, uncorked it, poured a portion of its contents upon a cloth which she had taken from a chair in passing, and instantly the sweet, pungent odor of ether filled the heated air.

She placed the bottle upon the floor beside her, and rising softly to her knees, with one hand covered her own mouth and nostrils, and with the other held the drugged cloth close to the nurse's face.

The woman stirred uneasily and breathed a faint, wavering sigh, then her breathing became deeper and more

regular for the next two minutes, and then Hulda Talford touched her.

There was no movement; she shook her; the woman never stirred.

"She's done for, and now for t'other un!" muttered Hulda Talford; but even as she spoke she knew that her work in that direction would never be carried out; for just as she reached forth her hand to take up the vial and again saturate the cloth, she became conscious that some one had moved, had even spoken, and facing about so suddenly that she upset the bottle and spilled its contents on the floor, she found herself looking into the dilated eyes and ghastly features of Inez Catheron.

"Who's there? Who are you? What do you want here?" exclaimed Mrs. Catheron, in a faint voice of weakness and terror. "Mrs. Glooth—Mrs. Glooth, there's some one in the room!" Then, as that "some one" turned so that the light streamed over her dark, malignant face, and revealed it to her:

"Hulda Talford!" she added, in a gasping voice of horror. "My Heaven, *you!*"

With the soundless swiftness of a cat leaping, Hulda Talford pounced upon her before she could utter another word, and the cloth, with its now half-evaporated complement of ether, was clapped over her mouth and nose.

"Yes, it is Hulda Talford!" wheezed the woman, as she forced her back upon the pillows and glared down into her dilated eyes. "Hulda Talford, who's come to pay back Kingdon Catheron's children as he paid hers! I want his brats to make 'em lower than my boy's lass may ever fall—to make 'em such women as honest folk'll shrink from in horror, and if——"

A scream broke over her words and cut the sentence short. The half evaporated ether was not strong enough to overpower the second victim, and tearing away the cloth with a mother's despairing strength, as the child beside her was torn from her grasp by the rude, vindictive hand of her assailant, Inez Catheron had sent up that one shrill, heart-broken cry, and then fainted upon her pillow.

In a twinkling there was the sound of some one leaping out of bed and scurrying across the floor overhead, and realizing that that cry of horrified despair had awakened somebody, and she dared not lose a moment in effecting her escape, Hulda Talford dashed to the window, leaped out, and stifling the cries of the child with her hand, scurried along the balcony to the other room, passed through it like a flash, and went swiftly and silently down through the darkness to the library floor just as Martha, the housemaid, issued from her own apartment in a state of semi-

dishabille, and came down the upper staircase with a lighted taper in her hand.

She went straight to the door of the sick-room and tapped upon the panel.

"Mrs. Glooth!" she called out nervously, "Mrs. Glooth, is there anything the matter?"

There was no response, for in the room beyond the drugged and the senseless were alike deaf.

"Lor', I was *sure* I heard something like a scream!" exclaimed Martha in a bewildered tone. "But they're both fast asleep, and I must a-dreamed it, unless——"

"Good land! if that fool of a butler ain't gone to bed and left the winder of the blue room wide open on a night like this. Like as not it was the storm I heerd, and it's a precious good thing I didn't call loud enough to wake the missus, poor dear, for nuthin' more than Jenkin's neglect—the blockhead!"

Then, passing into the blue room, she softly closed the window, and climbing the staircase, went back to bed.

Meantime Hulda Talford, with the stolen child wrapped in the folds of her cloak, and its cries hushed against her bosom, had passed through the library, made her escape from the house, and was now dashing toward the rear gate of the Park, and heading straight for the river.

"I must get into Pittsburgh before another hour is over my head," she gasped as she ran along. "The child's mother'll put 'em on my track at once, and they'll be arter me like a pack o' bloodhounds soon. But they sha'n't take the brat from me—I'll jump into the river w' it and we'll be drowned together before I'll let 'em take it back to wealth and luxury like that.

"I meant to have 'em both, but I've been balked in that—I've been cheated out o' half my revenge, but I won't lose it *all*, and now I've gotten *one* o' the brats in my arms, the d——l himself sha'n't tear it out of 'em and take it back alive. I'll die wi' it first—I swear I will!"

And with this resolve in her mind, added to the fear that the pursuit might be begun at any moment, she ran onward, holding the child in a desperate clutch, passed through the rear gate of the Park, and made at all speed for the river.

"I'll try and cross on the ice if I hear 'em coming afore I can reach the Alleghany bridge!" she panted as she glanced down from the steep banks to the ice-choked river below.

"I must get into Pittsburg and steal aboard the next train as goes out—no matter *where* it goes—and lay low till I can clap the brat into some out-of-the-way poorhouse and let her stay there till she's growed up, and me and Mark can claim her, and—— Eh! What's that I heered?"

She stopped abruptly as she uttered that last remark, and facing about, she bent forward and put her curved hand to her ear.

Somewhere in the darkness and the distance a dog had sent forth a sudden bark, and hearing it again as she stopped to listen, she uttered a snarling cry of despair and started to run.

"They're out arter me wi' hounds!" she gasped breathlessly. "I daren't hope to make the bridge. I must find some place where I can get down the river bank and cross on the ice. They'd ought to be some shrubs or something a-growin' along the banks here. Blast the hounds! I've got to stop and look if there's nothin' to help me get down!"

She crept to the snowy edge of the overhanging bank as she spoke, and bending over looked down into the darkness.

"Yes, there's shrubs here—I see 'em!" she cried out in a voice of delight, as she caught sight of some straggling branches peeping up a foot or two below the edge of the bank, and stepped to the brink for the purpose of reaching them. "I'm hard put, but I won't give up, and before those cursed hounds shall run me down——"

If ever there was an end to that sentence no mortal ear heard it! Speaking, she reached the edge of the jutting bank and stepped not upon the earth as she fancied, but upon a mass of ice lying hidden beneath the snow. She threw out her arms in a vain effort to regain her balance as she felt herself falling, the child, thrown by this action a trifle to the left, dropped from her grasp and crashed among the thickest of the bushes, and the last she ever saw of it—the last she ever saw of anything in this world—she saw in that moment when Heaven overtook her.

For a second only she swayed on the verge of the overhanging bank; for a second only her shrill, despairing cry rang through the air as she shot down through the darkness, then there was a heavy, crunching sound, as her body struck and broke the ice below; the gurgle of water, swirling as it took her down; the grinding of the floes, as they closed above her; and then—nothing but the noise of the storm and the wailing of a child caught in the bushes and swaying to and fro—a human pendulum between the snow above and the crunching ice in the death-trap below!

CHAPTER VI.

HOW HEAVEN DIRECTED IT.

"Is—is it much further, Taric? Is that the bridge where the lights are shinin'? Oh, I'm so cold—so cold! Hush the cur and drive it back—it has followed us long eno', and its barkin' seems uncanny, wi' this again' my heart. Let us rest somewhere. I tell 'ee I'm dead beat out."

"Courage, courage, Bess, my lass. A bit more and we'll reach the bridge. Stand out ag'in' the storm awhile, there's a dear. The trampin' is nigh over; and, thank God! we have money enough to *ride* all the rest o' the way, Bess."

And the speaker, a brawn young fellow of eight-and-twenty, with a dark, coppery skin, and a mass of curling black hair falling almost to his shoulders, and a rugged though kindly face looking out from beneath his battered hat, smiled tenderly upon his companion as he thus tried to cheer her, and gently stroked her long, dark hair.

But cheering her was hard work to-night, for the first great sorrow of her young life had found its way to her, and her face, beautiful in spite of its sadness, wore a pitiful look, which no word of his could drive away.

In age she could not have been more than nineteen, and her strange, fanciful garb, made up as it was of many bright-hued materials, seemed somehow to add to her youthful appearance, for the ample skirts were short; she wore a scarlet kerchief, banded about her dark, luxuriant hair, and surmounted by an odd-looking "mob-cap," of white and orange.

She wore a dingy red shawl, folded over her shoulders, and bundled closely about something which she hugged to her breast with all the strength of her young arms, and like her companion's, her skin was as dark and ruddy as molded copper.

"Shall we have enough to ride to New York, Taric?" she questioned, as they trudged onward together in the teeth of the storm. "We have tramped so many days it will be like heaven to ride, and you are sure we have enough?"

"Ay, enough for that, and one steerage berth on the steamer, lass. I can work my passage home, you know, and, I thank God, we'll be back wi' our people again, and in our own loving country, lass."

"I wish we'd never left it!" she responded, drearily. "It's as they told when we left the tribe. There'd be hard times before us in a land where gypsies are not known, and I wish we'd never come to it, wi' its wild, hard winters and its strange ways!"

"Hush, Bess," said Taric, gently. "We'd no choice, remember, lass. *Some one* had got to do the searching for Hulda the Weasel, now that The Kinchen is dead, and when we drew lots by the camp-fire it fell to me. Remember that The Kinchen's death makes Hulda the Weasel the queen o' the tribe; and if she lives she must be found, or if she is dead her death must be clearly proven. It is now eight-and-twenty years since she left England and went to the far west, and since that time no word of hers has reached the tribe. There were many lives betwixt her and the Romany rule, and no one dreamed that they would be all swept away. But since they have been, she must be traced, lass, and thank God that our part of the work is done and over. We've spent the allotted year trying to find her, now we'll go back to let others take up the task. Heaven knows it's been bitter enough on us, my lass, since it has cost us Zillah's life!"

"Don't!" she cried out in a broken voice, as she strained the burden she bore closer to her bosom, and bowed her face above it with a burst of tears. "I'm not used to it yet, Taric! It's only four hours since the breath went outer her wee body, and my heart is breaking—breaking! Oh, drive off that dog! He's been following us and barking at our heels since Zillah closed her eyes. I tell 'ee it's an uncanny dog, Taric. It sniffs the dead, and I won't put her down until he leaves us. Oh, my wee one, my wee one! to think thou'rt never to see thy mother's country, to think thou wert only to know two poor months o' life, when I loved thee so! Drive off the dog, Taric—I tell 'ee its barking makes me creep."

A dozen times Taric had vainly striven to do this since the animal began to follow them, but now he adopted a different plan to get rid of the animal.

Stooping down and crouching in the snow, until the snarling cur drew near and began to sniff about him, he suddenly pounced upon it by the throat, and dragging it to the river bank hurled it over into the darkness.

"Thou'rt rid of it now, Bess," he said, "and we can lay the wee one away without fear. We cannot take its little body away with us to the city, lass, and so——"

He stopped abruptly and faced about with a startled gasp. Somewhere in the darkness beyond a woman's voice had suddenly sent forth a piercing shriek that ceased at its wildest point, as though something had closed the mouth from which it issued.

"There's summat wrong, lass!" exclaimed Taric, dashing forward in the direction from whence the cry had arisen. "It's a woman in sore need of help. Come, Bess, come!"

She followed without hesitation, all her weakness forgotten in the excitement of the thing; but although they both searched about them as they ran, and Taric called out frequently, they saw neither sight nor sign of anything, and the piercing cry rose never again to guide them.

"It was the death-fetch o' the uncanny dog!" gasped Bess, catching her husband by the arm. "There's nob-but oursel's here, Taric; let us go before it speers us."

"Hark!" he cut in sharply. "Hark! what's that? Don't 'ee hear a 'wailin',' Bess? A wailin' like—like Zillah used to make?"

"Ay! there—there!" she gasped, pointing to the river bank. "But don't 'ee go a-nigh it, Taric. It's the leadin' o' the uncanny dog."

"It isn't—it's a child!" he answered, breathlessly.

Then hastening to the spot whence the wailing cries arose, he sunk down upon his hands and knees, and crawling forward, peered over into the darkness.

There, not two feet below him, caught in the thick bushes and dangling over certain death, hung the tiny body of Inez Catheron's stolen child.

Calling Bess to him, and creeping closer to the edge of the embankment, and reaching down until his strong hand gripped the wailing infant, Taric lifted it from its dangerous perch and held it up.

With a sharp and sudden cry, Bess pounced upon it and hugged it to her bosom.

"Give it to me; the Lord sent it to me, and it's mine—mine!"

Then wrapping her shawl about it and kneeling in the storm, she fell to swaying backward and forward, and crooning as she hushed its cries against her bosom.

"Look how it stills!" she cried, with a short, hysterical laugh. "It knows me—it knows me, Taric! and the Lord has sent Zillah's soul back to me in a stronger body."

"Nay, I think not," responded Taric, who, while he still had much of the Romany faith in the transmigration of souls—a faith as old as Pythagoras—had noted the delicate texture of the child's garments, and recalled the woman's scream as coupled with this and the position in which he had discovered the infant. "It is a child of wealth, and I fear some one has either tried to destroy it, or has been injured by an accident, which——"

"It is mine, I tell 'ee!" broke in Bess, vehemently. "It's Zillah's soul come back to me in a stronger and better body. Take away the other—it's only clay, my wee one's soul is here."

"But some one may claim it, Bess."

"I won't give it up—it's mine, I tell 'ee—mine! There can't nobbut claim my own wee one. Why should they?"

"Some one may recognize its garments," began Taric, but almost as soon as he suggested the thing, Bess had torn off the tiny embroidered slip and the little woolen sack and thrown them before him.

"Gimme those on the body she used to own!" she cried, as she cuddled the child to her bosom and held the shawl over it. "If there's them as dare claim these, let 'em claim the clay wi' 'em, for I tell 'ee I won't give my wee one up. See how she knows me, my blessed. See how she creeps to my heart and stops her cryin'. Hush, thee wee one! thou'lt see thy mother's land and thy mother's people after, all and thou'lt go home wi' us, my Zillah, home wi' us."

Taric saw there was no use trying to reason with her; indeed, to tell the truth, he was overjoyed to see her so blythe and happy once more, and without a word obeyed her request and stripped the clothing off from his own dead child to array the little foundling.

Screening it tenderly with her shawl, Bess drew the coarse garments upon it, and then holding it close to her heart began to croon to it and nurse it, while Taric, with reverent hands, scooped a little grave in the snow bank for the child who had perished on the journey home.

It had gone as it had come, with his heart held in the clasp of its baby fingers, and a stranger had taken its place.

But, after all, what did it matter so that Bess was satisfied and *he* knew that the one he had loved was gone beyond recall, even ere this one came?

He would love it for bringing the smiles back to Bess' lips; he would be tender with it for the sake of the little one over whose grave it had come to them, and into whose place it had crept; and so, gently brushing the snow that covered his dead, he arose, and again facing the storm with Bess, passed on and went his way, taking the child with him to the life that awaited her in the land beyond the sea.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANKRUPT HEART.

"WELL, it's my private opinion that folks in this house have all gone crazy!" announced Martha, the housemaid, returning from her fifth trip to the dining-room—for the purpose of ascertaining the time—and hurling this "private opinion" at the heads of her half dozen colleagues who were clustered about the kitchen-table and deep in

the enjoyment of a substantial breakfast. "First of all, there's Herrick as says he *didn't* leave the winder of the blue room standing wide open in all that storm last night, and——"

"More I didn't!" cut in the butler, sullenly. "I'm no fool not to know what I'm a-doin' of, and I tell you I didn't *touch* the winder o' the blue room. I tried the door when I went up to bed, and it was locked tight and fast, and if there's anybody that's crazy in this house, it's *you*, Martha Boggs, and that's flat. You dreamed all that there nonsense about gittin' out o' bed and findin' the winder of the blue room open, that's what you did."

"*Did I, indeed?*" retorted Martha, with a look and tone of blighting sarcasm. "Well, my wits is as sharp as them o' some persons as I could mention, and as I don't have the keys o' the wine cellar at my fingers' ends, I'm a deal less likely to be mistook about things as happens arter I've gone up to bed, Herrick Johnston, I can tell you *that!* Dreamed it, indeed! Maybe, now, you'll tell me that I'm dreamin' that it's half past six o'clock, and Mrs. Glooth ain't come down yet for the broth as she told cook to have ready at six sharp—you're so terrible certain as everybody dreams but *you!*"

At that moment the kitchen door opened and closed with a bang, and a small boy, whose eyes seemed popping out of his head, came dashing into the room.

It was the head gardener's son, and, from his breathless state and his excited appearance, it was evident that he had run all the way from the gardener's lodge, and was the bearer of some important piece of news.

"Say!" belched forth the boy—"say, my mother wants to know if you're all blamed fools over here, and, if you ain't, what kind of a nurse you've got, to go leave Mis' Catheron's bedroom winder standin' wide open in de middle of de winter, and her sick a-bed?"

A bomb-shell exploding in their midst, or the ceiling crashing suddenly down upon their unsuspecting heads, could not have produced a greater panic among the servants than that startling announcement; and, as though actuated by one common impulse, they leaped to their feet, rushed to the door, and scurried out into the snowy grounds.

A single glance was enough to proclaim the truth of the boy's statement.

The window of Mrs. Catheron's bed-chamber was standing wide open, and the curtains, drawn outward by the current of air, were flapping like signals of distress in the blustery February morning.

For a moment the servants stood as though spell-bound,

their eyes dilated, and their thoughts full of unutterable things; then, with a startled cry of terror and amazement:

"Look! look!" screamed Martha, clutching Herrick's arm, and pointing to the lower balcony. "The *library* window is open, too! Something has happened in the night, and I did *not* dream that missus called!"

Then, scarcely hearing the horrified cry which greeted her words, she broke away from her companions, and shouting breathlessly "Come!" darted back to the kitchen door and dashed into the house.

The panic-stricken crowd was at her heels before she reached the hallway, and surged about her—clamoring, screaming, trembling—as she scurried up the stairs.

From staircase to staircase she raced onward, calling to Mrs. Glooth as she ran, but receiving no response—and so dashing onward and upward, with the pack of frightened servants at her heels, reached Inez Catheron's door, and wildly beat it with her frantic hands.

"Mrs. Glooth! Mrs. Glooth! Wake up! wake up!" she screamed, as she pounded the panels of the door. "Are you deaf or dead? Wake up! wake up! for God's sake, Mrs. Glooth!"

But now, as ever, no answer came.

"Stand aside, Martha, and let me break in the door!" exclaimed the butler, excitedly, when it became evident that no noise, however loud, had power to elicit a response. "God help us! but I'm afeared there's summat wrong in there. Stand aside, I say, and let me break in the door!"

Sick and faint with terror, the girl obeyed; and gathering his whole strength for the effort, Herrick hurled his heavy body against the wooden barrier.

It gave way with a heavy crash, and precipitated him headlong into the room; and then ensued a scene of the wildest excitement possible to conceive.

Panting and trembling in their terror, the servants dashed into the ice-cold room; a cry—sharp, shrill, full of horror—went up from every lip; and then there fell a silence, more appalling than the sound, as they huddled together and stared at the picture which was to go down with them to the grave.

The silken curtains, catching the draught created by the open door, blew outward and upward, and let the gray light of the morning stream into the dainty chamber; and by it they saw—those horrified men and women—the motionless figure of Mrs. Glooth, as she lay on the cot-bed, with her arms folded about something that was rolled in a warm, thick shawl, and held close to her bosom; while on the couch beside her—just as she fell when she swooned last night—her gold hair tumbled, her hands clinched in

the bed-clothes, and the gray light of the morning streaming over her colorless face, Inez, Lady Catheron lay before them—dead!

CHAPTER VIII.

“RING OUT YOUR BELLS, LET MOURNING SHOWS BE SPREAD.”

FOR one moment not a sound broke the stillness, as that horrified group huddled, and dumbly stared at the beautiful dead face among the pillows; then there was a gasp—a movement—the shrieks of women and the groans of men, and then “confusion worse confounded.”

With a cry of keenest anguish, Martha threw herself across the body of her mistress, and frantically called her name, and chafed her stiffened hands, in vain effort to infuse some warmth into them; and in the midst of the excitement, the feeble wailing of a child trembled piteously through the room and drew her attention to the cot.

“Missus is dead—missus is dead, and we must get the children out of this ice-cold room afore it kills them, too,” panted poor Martha, in an agony of alarm, as she rushed to the cot and vainly endeavored to awaken Mrs. Glooth. “Herrick—John—*somebody!* Go for the doctor—ring the alarm; there’s been dark work here, and I’m afeard it’s them dreadful strikers! Mrs. Glooth, Mrs. Glooth! for God’s sake wake up! I can’t get the babies out of your arms, you hold them so terrible tight, and——”

A scream—shrill, agonizing, dreadful—brought the sentence to a close; and uttering it, Martha recoiled from the cot and clapped both hands to her temples.

“What is it?—what’s the matter?” gasped her companions, excitedly; and almost on the same instant:

“She’s dead, too—she’s dead too!” whispered Martha, throwing out one hand and frantically waving it toward the motionless figure of Mrs. Glooth. “She’s dead, and there’s only *one* child in her arms! My Heaven, only *one!* Send out an alarm—ring the bell—go for the police! There’s been murder here—murder and abduction, and one of the children is gone!”

The excitement which had prevailed when the door was broken in was as nothing to that which ensued now.

The women shrieked and ran in a dozen different directions to search for the missing child, whilst Martha, nerving herself to the ordeal, fell upon her knees beside the cot, and forcing open the rigid arms of Mrs. Glooth, tore the wailing infant from her dead embrace and hushed its cries against her own tender heart; and presently, as if to add the last dreadful adjunct to this tragedy of horror,

Herrick climbed the stairs of the belfry and sent an alarm booming out over the frosty stillness of the winter morning, and for the next half hour Catheron Park was the scene of an excitement which utterly beggars description.

The doctor was sent for in post haste, and rode back with the hostler at break-neck speed; but, quickly as he responded to the call, the police—summoned to the theater of the tragedy by the pealing of the alarm-bell—had forestalled him, and he found Catheron Park in charge of the authorities.

The chief of police met him in the lower hall, and escorted him to the chamber of his former patient.

She was past hope—he saw that at a glance, and, drawing the sheet over her dead face, turned away with a sigh, and gave his attention to Mrs. Glooth.

“I can do nothing here, either, sir,” he sorrowfully admitted to the chief, after he had examined the body of the nurse. “Mrs. Catheron’s death is due to shock and exposure, at such a critical period, but this poor creature’s fate mystifies me completely. I have known for some time that her heart was slightly affected, but I never thought it a very serious case, nor yet anticipated any fatal result.”

“Still persons whose hearts are only slightly affected are apt to die when an anæsthetic is administered, are they not, doctor?” asked the chief.

“Yes; it is always dangerous where there is any heart trouble whatsoever,” returned Dr. Harrowby, “and if an anæsthetic had been administered to this poor creature, I should unhesitatingly pronounce that the cause of death, but since it has not been administered——”

“Your pardon, doctor, but it *has*!” interrupted the chief, quietly. “If you will look at this vial you will see by the label that it formerly contained ether. I found it upon the floor beside Mrs. Glooth’s body, but, before using it as a means of discovering the perpetrator of this horrible deed, I wish you to examine it, doctor, and tell me if it really did contain ether, or if that label is only a blind.”

Dr. Harrowby took the bottle, examined it closely, smelled it, and assured the chief that the label truthfully represented the former contents.

“And this cloth, which was picked up from the floor, doctor—has it not been used for the purpose of administering the anæsthetic?”

Again Dr. Harrowby made an examination, and again answered in the affirmative.

“Clearly, then, these two women here, like the master of the house, met death at the hands of an assassin,” said

the chief, as he took the bottle and the cloth from the doctor; "and, as this second tragedy has—by reason of its close following upon the first, and the abduction of one of the infants—every appearance of an act of revenge, it may fairly be attributed to the same cause—that is: the strike—and some one of the four hundred striking colliers must, therefore, be held accountable for the deed."

"Your reasoning seems sound enough to my way of thinking, sir," returned Dr. Harrowby. "But out of four hundred suspected persons will it not be almost impossible to discover the guilty *one*? Ah, if only Mrs. Glooth had survived, we might have had some definite clew to aid us in the apprehension of the monster."

"I think not, doctor," responded the chief. "From the position of the body, I believe the woman was sleeping at the time the ether was administered, and could, had she lived, have given us no clew to a person she never saw, and whose presence in the apartment was unknown to her."

"But it is not the identification of the assassin which troubles me. I shall convince you presently that it will not be so difficult as you imagine to find a clew to *him*; but it is the identification of the stolen child which puzzles me most, and it is for that reason I desired to have a talk with you. It would be somewhat difficult for a stranger to identify a child which was less than two days old at the time of its abduction, and which, without some distinctive mark, could scarcely be told from any other child of like age at such a tender period of its existence; and in order that we may not have some other child palmed off upon us, should we succeed in tracing the missing infant, I am obliged to appeal to you for whatever aid you can give us in the matter. You, I believe, attended the unfortunate mother at the time the children were born. Will you, then, tell me if either or both bore any birth-mark, any peculiarity of feature, which would be liable to prove a means of establishing the identity of the stolen child?"

Dr. Harrowby shook his head gravely.

"I could not say," he answered. "The tragical circumstances attending the birth of the children—that is to say, the murder of Mr. Catheron—had thrown the mother into such a state of mental excitement that she demanded all my attention in order to save her life and reason; and I barely gave the infants a passing glance. If there had been any birth-mark upon either, the nurse was the one who would have been most likely to know it; and she, poor creature, is beyond telling us now."

"Then you cannot give us even the slightest mark of identification, doctor?"

"Not even the slightest, Mr. Bryce. But possibly some of the household servants——"

The chief put up his hand with a gesture of wild despair.

"I have already questioned, but they know nothing," he interrupted. "Not one of them ever saw either of the children until this morning. They were not, of course, permitted to enter this room so soon after the birth of the infants, and, save the girl Martha—who seems to have been a favorite with her late mistress—no one can give us a clew to anything connected with them. And even the little *she* can tell promises but small results. It appears that she not only aided in the construction of certain parts of the infant wardrobe, prior to the birth of the children, but had seen every article comprised in it, and remembers all distinctly. After searching through the entire lot, she finds that one costume is missing, and it is therefore only a plausible theory that the child wore it when stolen. The description of that costume I have written down in my note-book, and it is this:

"'A night-robe of finest linen, richly embroidered in a peculiar serpentine pattern of daisies, the wrists and neck edged with narrow Valenciennes lace. Also a pair of "bootees" of pink and white wool, tied with narrow pink satin ribbons, and a heavily embroidered "pinning blanket" of fine white flannel, which must, since they are missing, have been secured by two safety-pins of solid gold!'

"It is, you see, doctor, a very minute description, but one not likely to be of any great service to us, since the child's garments could readily be thrown away, or even placed upon some other infant, and thus baffle us completely. However, I have sent men out with directions to scour the country in quest of any person or persons who may have been seen having in charge a child so dressed, and have also sent word of this second tragedy to the late Mr. Catheron's solicitor at Pittsburg. Pending his arrival, let us go below and ascertain if my men have made any new discovery."

Nothing loath, Dr. Harrowby followed him from the room; the officer on guard closed the door as they passed out, and in the gray light of the winter morning, all that was mortal of Inez Catheron and Hester Glooth lay in the death chamber undisturbed and alone.

The news of the second tragedy at Catheron Park had spread like wildfire, and by this time the grounds were surrounded by a perfect mob which momentarily swelled as men, women and children flocked up from the mining

district and huddled about the gates, talking in hoarse whispers and staring with pale faces and dilated eyes at the great stone mansion which had so often seemed to them like some fairy palace where peace and plenty made life a dream, but which stood to-day, under the gray shadow of the February sky, grim, desolate, forbidding, as though it were in truth a house accursed and resting

“Under some prodigious ban
Of excommunication.”

Down-stairs in the culinary department, the servants, under the surveillance of an officer, huddled around the kitchen range and discussed in hushed voices the gruesome tragedy and their own prospects of *another* situation; in the morning-room, where a wood fire burned in the low grate, Martha—also under guard—paced up and down the floor, lulling the orphaned heiress to sleep, and alternately kissing its golden head and bathing its tiny face with tears, and in the wide, luxurious entrance hall a knot of officers stood before the door of a room, where yet another silent figure lay in all the awful majesty of death, and with lowered voices, discussed amongst themselves the outlook of the case as Chief Bryce and Dr. Harrowby came softly down-stairs.

“Hadly, I want you!”

The voice was Bryce’s, and at its sound one of the officers stepped briskly away from his companions and advanced to meet his chief.

“Mount the swiftest horse you can get and ride down to Hosmer, the druggist, with this bottle,” exclaimed Mr. Bryce, putting into the man’s hand the vial which had been found beside the body of Hester Glooth. “It formerly contained an anæsthetic, which, according to the label, was supplied by him on the prescription of one Dr. Bristow. Ask Hosmer to look at his book, and tell you to whom the bottle was given when filled, and—— Stop a moment! lose no time in returning to me with the report. I need not tell you to keep your errand secret and to bid Hosmer do the same. Now go.”

Without a word, Hadley touched his cap and vanished, and one minute later, Dr. Harrowby, looking through the glass panel of the vestibule door, saw him gallop down the drive, swing out through the gates, and race away at break-neck speed in the direction of Alleghany City.

“I see your drift, Mr. Bryce,” he said, as he turned away and followed the chief to the library. “The empty bottle is a valuable clew; For the man who purchased the ether must certainly be the murderer.”

“Not necessarily, doctor,” responded the chief. “It may have passed out of the original purchaser’s hands,

but when we discover *him*, we can soon ferret out to whom he gave it, or, if stolen from him, when and how it was lost. It is not—as I have already told you—the identity of the assassin, which promises so much trouble in this case, doctor, but it is the identity of the child.”

Was Mr. Bryce among the prophets?

In the strange, dark, after years, when this grewsome tragedy was recalled to his mind by the famous “case” that grew out of it, Dr. Harrowby often asked himself that puzzling question.

For the present, however, he gave his whole attention to the chief’s theories—propounded as a sort of stop-gap, pending the return of Hadley; and for more than an hour the second tragedy in Catheron Park was discussed in all its phases; the certainty that it was a direct outcome of the strike was established in the minds of both men, beyond peradventure; and Harrowby had already begun to believe that the murderer was as good as caught, when the library door was thrown open, and Hadley stepped into the room.

Chief Bryce was on his feet like a shot; but before even he could frame the all-important question, Hadley gave the answer.

“I have seen Hosmer, and found out everything, chief,” he said, as he advanced. “The prescription was filled last winter, and delivered to the man who was ‘sent up’ yesterday—Mark Talford.”

“Mark Talford!”

“Yes, chief—the husband of the woman who shot Mr. Catheron the night before last, and whose mother is at present the only member of the family not in the hands of the authorities for implication in——”

“Find that woman—find that woman, and arrest her without delay!” cut in Mr. Bryce, excitedly. “Fool that I was—not to have thought of Hulda Talford before this. I said, when I saw her at her son’s trial, that she was just the kind of woman to carry a grudge forever; she had the look of a ‘bad lot,’ and there was the devil in her eyes when Mr. Catheron gave his testimony. And yet, in the face of that, I have been blockhead enough to forget all about her; and ten to one she has got the start of us, and is—Heaven knows where, by this time. Quick, Hadley! Back to the station with you, and send out a general alarm. Telegraph all down the line to have that woman arrested on sight; send Barden and Simmonds to the mining district to search for her there, and if——”

The sentence remained forever unfinished.

At that moment there was a commotion in the outer

hall, the library door flew suddenly open, and one of the officers stepped hastily into the room.

"I beg your pardon, chief," he said, excitedly. "I don't know when these horrors are going to end; but Dorker has just brought in news of another tragedy, sir."

"Another tragedy?"

"Yes, chief. You know that tough-looking character—the mother of the man who was 'sent up' for the assault on the late Mr. Catheron?"

"Hulda Talford—you mean Hulda Talford, Simmonds?" gasped Bryce, excitedly. "Speak quickly, man. Is there any news of her?"

"Yes, chief," responded Simmonds, briskly. "She's been drowned, and they have just fished her body out of the Alleghany River and taken it to the Morgue."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST ENDING OF THE TRAGEDY.

MR. BRYCE uttered a groan of dismay and dropped into the nearest chair.

"Drowned!" he exclaimed, despairingly, as he lifted his eyes to Simmond's face. "Hulda Talford drowned! Good Heaven! is it possible that Fate can be so cruel?"

"Say, rather, that Fate has been most just, Mr. Bryce!" interposed Dr. Harrowby, somewhat reproachfully; "for, if Hulda Talford be, indeed, the guilty party—and in the face of the evidence she undoubtedly is—surely Heaven has overtaken her with but little delay, and proved once again that 'the wages of sin is death.' If she has escaped the vengeance of man, she has, at least, been called to account by her Maker; and what does it matter, after all, how a murderess dies, so long as the world is rid of her?"

"Do you think I am regretting her fate?" responded Mr. Bryce, as he rose to his feet. "Do you think I am wasting any sorrow over the fact that the state has been spared the expense of trying her for her life, and the gallows been cheated of its just due? It is not for the guilty I am sorry, but for the innocent, doctor. With that woman's death the Catheron case ends, so far as the authorities are concerned, and I have no longer any cause to give the matter my attention. All is over, the murder avenged, and there is nothing more for the police to do."

"Surely, Mr. Bryce, you cannot mean that! Recollect the stolen child. You certainly will not relax your efforts to find her, simply because Heaven in its own wise way has seen fit to punish her abductor?"

"Ay, and in that punishment, sir, encompassed the death of her little victim!" returned Mr. Bryce. "Can you not reason this thing out, doctor, knowing where the woman's body was found? To my way of thinking, it is a clear case of suicide—a Samson-like suicide, if you will, which in its own end brings the destruction of others."

"Good Heaven! you cannot surely mean——"

"That Hulda Talford, knowing it to be impossible to escape the punishment of her crimes, deliberately threw herself—and the child she had stolen—into the river, and died gloating over the knowledge that she had avenged her fancied wrongs by the almost total extinction of the family she hated," supplemented Mr. Bryce.

"Depend upon it, doctor, at some time, sooner or later, the body of the stolen child will be found, and the truth of my theory will be established beyond the shadow of a doubt."

Dr. Harrowby made no response. Backed by such reasoning as he brought forth to substantiate it, Mr. Bryce's theory seemed very plausible, and he had just branched off into another argument in favor of his views upon the subject, when one of his men appeared at the door of the library and announced the arrival of Mr. Maverick Narkland, the late Kingdon Catheron's solicitor.

He came in—a tall, dignified man of five-and-forty, with "the majesty of the law" written all over him; the officers were turned out, the three professional gentlemen drew up their chairs, and once again the matter was begun at the beginning and discussed all over again.

For two hours they remained there in solemn conclave, and when, at last, this grave council of three came to an end, Mr. Bryce's theory was very firmly impressed upon the minds of his two companions.

"As far as I can see, gentlemen, my better plan is, then, to cable Lord Glandore the sad intelligence of his daughter's death, and to say nothing regarding the lost child until we have more positive evidence of its fate, or until his lordship arrives in America to take charge of his remaining grandchild," announced Mr. Narkland, as he arose to take his departure. "The news of his daughter's death, following so soon upon that of her husband, will be a terrible shock to his lordship, and it would be cruel to further distress him by mentioning the abduction and probable slaying of the child, until time has blunted the keenness of his sorrow, and he is better prepared to stand the blow."

In this opinion both the doctor and the chief of police heartily concurred, and, after a few further remarks upon the sorrowful subject, Mr. Narkland bowed himself out of the room and hastily took his departure.

One hour later the message containing the news of Kingdon Catheron's murder, together with that of the maternity and subsequent death of the Lady Inez, flashed over the Atlantic cable to Lord Glandore.

By nightfall an answer was returned, and, reading it, as he sat alone in his office, Maverick Narkland felt that he had done well in lessening the crushing blow "even a little."

It told him, that answering cablegram, that Lord Glandore had been ill for several weeks, and even if the news of his daughter's death had not crushed and bent him to the earth, it would still have been impossible for him to dream of taking an ocean voyage in his present state of health.

The doctors had forbidden him to think of attempting such a thing, but his sister, Lady Katherine Morford, had kindly consented to represent him by proxy, and would start for America, by the first outgoing steamer, to look after the welfare of his orphaned grandchild.

Maverick Narkland dropped the cablegram as he finished reading it, and something like a mist moved over his eyes as he thought of that day when Lady Inez Catheron came as a bride to the fatal house where she lay to-night—a corpse!

* * * * *

On the morrow the coroner's inquest took place in the long, oak-paneled billiard-room at Catheron Park, and four days later—having been deferred as long as possible in the vain hope of Lady Morford's arrival—a solemn train of carriages wound out through the gates of the park, followed by an immense concourse of people, took its way to Hilldale Cemetery, and there, under a wild, gray, rainy sky, the last sad rites were performed over two coffins, and all that was mortal of Kingdon Catheron and his wife were laid in the one grave, out of the sight of men and the world forever and aye!

Through the stormy twilight of the last February day, the carriages and the empty hearse rolled out of the graveyard, and left them to their dreamless sleep and the last, most perfect union of their loving souls—"twain halves of a sundered heart made fast, to never more be parted."

On the morning of the third of March, Lady Morford, a sweet-faced, sweet-voiced woman, so like to her dead mistress that Martha's heart went out to her with one great

bound, arrived at Catheron Park, and for the first time learned the truth regarding the tragedy of the stolen child.

"Oh, Mr. Narkland, how can I thank you for having kept the knowledge from my poor brother?" she said, with a rush of sudden tears, when he had told her all. "His whole life was centered in Inez, and terribly as he has been smitten by the news of her death, if he heard that she died through violence, I believe the blow would kill him. Better a thousand times that he should never learn that there were twin children born, than that the horrible truth should ever reach his ears. Until we know for certain that the poor, stolen darling is really dead, I should only mention the birth of one."

"And after that, your ladyship, after we have proved its death—what then?"

"It would do no good to undeceive him," she answered, sadly; "and I will still keep the secret. In the interest of little Inez—for such this child shall be christened—I think it will be better to settle up the estate as soon as possible, Mr. Narkland, for she will, of course, make her home in England in the future. Lord Glandore, as her grandfather, becomes, of course, her legal guardian; and he has expressed a wish to have her brought to him as soon as she is strong enough to stand an ocean voyage, and that wish I shall certainly respect."

"Oh, take me with you, my lady, please—please take me with you!" broke in Martha, at this juncture. "She's never left me for one moment since her beautiful mother died; she's growed to be part o' me, like, my lady, and—oh! if you take her from me you'll surely break my heart. Oh, don't say no, Lady Morford, please—please don't say no! She'll need a nurse to take care of her, and I'll be a slave to her if you'll only let me go with her, my lady. I'll watch her night and day. I won't let one hair of her head ever be injured, and I'll never tell Lord Glandore about the other one. I'll promise never to breathe a word of it, never to think of it, even, if you'll only let me go!"

The evident sincerity of the girl touched her ladyship deeply, her eyes filled with tears, and gently patting Martha on the shoulder:

"You are a good and faithful creature!" she said. "I believe that you will keep your promise, Martha, and—you shall go! No, never mind thanking me, and don't devour little Inez in your joy. We want her to gain all the strength possible during the next five or six weeks, at the expiration of which time I hope to have matters somewhat settled, and to find baby in a condition to stand the voyage. It will be advisable to place all my late

nephew's real estate upon the market as soon as possible, I think, Mr. Narkland, and dispose of it without delay. In the meantime, let every effort be made to trace the lost child, for if I leave this land uncertain of its fate, I shall never know a moment's peace to the day I die!"

But to leave America without being convinced of the lost child's death, was not written against Lady Morford's name in the book of human destiny; for long before the April rains came to melt the snow-drifts by the river-side, the papers were full of a ghastly "find" made by two boys who were trudging along to reach the Pittsburg bridge.

In the windy twilight of a mid-March morning, they had come upon a pack of revenous dogs who were tearing at something which they had dragged from the snow, and from which the boys drove them away, only to find the shapeless remains of a tiny human body.

The features were mutilated beyond all hope of recognition, the body was so mangled that it was impossible to guess what had been its size, but about it clung the tattered fragments of an embroidered "slip," and two tiny, knit "booties" of pink and white wool.

So it fell out that Taric's daughter was laid to rest in Hilledale Cemetery, and a tiny white stone, engraved with the name of "Catheron," erected above her grave, and when in the dripping April weather Lady Morford sailed for England in company with Martha and little Inez, she left America satisfied of the lost child's death and glad that she had never mentioned its birth to the Earl of Glandore.

Catheron Park had passed into other hands; the coal mines had been sold; the railroad stock disposed of, and the proceeds placed in the Bank of England to the credit of the baby heiress; the nine days' wonder went the way of all earthly things; the name and fame of "Young King Coal" died out and were forgotten, and all that remained to tell the story of that tragic strike was the tall white shaft in Hilledale Cemetery, which bore upon its sculptured base the simple record:

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
KINGDON CATHERON
and
INEZ,
HIS WIFE."

PART SECOND.—AFTER TWENTY YEARS.

CHAPTER X.

A HOUSE-PARTY.

"BUT, Inez, my darling, this is very unreasonable, and I cannot see what possible motive you can have for disliking her ladyship. It is not like you to be unjust, my dear, and to my way of thinking, Lady Blanche Hay is a very charming woman.

"And to mine, grandpa, she is the most odious creature in the universe," responded Miss Catheron with a shrug of her shapely shoulders; then, as she perceived his lordship's shocked look: "There!" she added, gayly, "don't look so alarmingly black, grandpa; and please don't ask me why I dislike her ladyship, for I assure you that I haven't the least idea, only that she is thoroughly obnoxious to me in every way. I am sorry she was asked to be one of our 'house-party.' For my part, I do not see what excuse there is for people to tolerate her in society. Possibly"—with a laugh—"all this sounds like rank heresy to you, grandpa, for her ladyship is an almost universal favorite with the gentlemen; but so far as I am concerned, she is a sort of social infliction that is very hard to bear; and I am sure that poor Lady Morford—before she died—regarded her in much the same light. To my way of thinking, grandpa, faithful old Martha Boggs—bless her heart!—would, if she were sent into society, be eminently more decorous than Lord Hay's pretty young widow!"

The old earl made a soft, clicking sound with his tongue and teeth—a sound indicative of mild despair—and shook his white head.

"My dear, my dear! you really mustn't say such shocking things simply because you dislike a person—and that, on your own showing, for no reasonable cause!" he said, reprovably. "If Lady Hay is a trifle lively, surely that's no sin—no disgrace, Inez. Consider her youth, my dear. She is only three-and-twenty, even now, and has been a widow for almost four years. She was a mere child when Lord Hay married her and brought her to England. Since the date of her *debut* in British society, she has certainly borne an unblemished reputation, Inez."

"Since the date of her *debut*—yes," responded Miss Catheron, lifting her white shoulders in a most eloquent way. "But what was she *before* that? History is very dark upon that important point, grandpa, whilst Rumor—as

Shakespeare drew her, 'enters the scene, painted full of tongues.' More than one person has been bad enough to suggest that the earlier days of her ladyship's life were spent behind the scenes—she is so well acquainted with stage-craft, and proves such a valuable adjunct to private theatricals."

"Still that is no disgrace, Inez. The time has long since passed when the stage was obliged to apologize for itself. Nowadays sensible people regard it in the light of an educator, not a scourge, and many an actress has found her way into the peerage and graced it with her presence. If Lady Hay has been upon the stage, it is no reason that she should be regarded as a social outcast. It is not a disgraceful profession, Inez."

"I am very well aware of that fact," returned Miss Catheron. "What I cannot understand, however, is why her ladyship should so indignantly deny it. She flew into a perfect passion last winter when Miss Hatton remarked that she (her ladyship) knew how to arrange effects quite as well as any professional, and suggested that she become our 'coach,' instead of putting us to the trouble of engaging one from London. If Lady Hay *has* been upon the stage and yet denies it so vehemently, the fact, the inference is obvious: It was either the stage of a very low theater, or her connection with it will not bear investigation. You remember her late husband's proclivities, grandpa.

"His tastes ran to gay burlesques, ballerinas and ladies of the flying-trapeze persuasion. Who is to say that when he met and married his pretty American wife he did not find her dancing break-downs in some third-rate place of amusement? He was quite capable of such a piece of insanity, and her ladyship's actions since he brought her to Europe—and then considerately consented to break his neck at the Burton fox-hunt—have to my mind given color to the theory. I am sorry that she was ever asked to Glandore Court, grandpapa; but since you have seen fit to invite her, I shall strive to do my duty, and remember that however obnoxious she is to me, she is still our guest, and as such, commands courtesy at my hands! My position may not be a very pleasant one, but I fully appreciate its exigencies, and will strive to do my best."

"I am sure of that, Inez," returned Lord Glandore, warmly. "You are a true *chatelaine*, my darling, and your guest is always a sacred responsibility."

Miss Catheron made no response.

Turning quietly, she walked over to the window, looked pensively out upon the spreading acres of Glandore Court, and stood there long—quite silent—with the linger-

ing sunlight of the summer evening aslant on her thoughtful face.

A tall, beautiful blonde, brow-bound with burning gold; a slender, statuesque figure; a small, erect head, whose every movement seemed instinct with grace and eloquent of imperial dignity; a face at once sweetly-human and beautifully pure; eyes as blue and soft as the summer skies; hands and arms like a goddess, and a neck like carven pearl; that was Inez Catheron, the daughter and heiress of the unfortunate man who was slain in the great Pittsburgh coal strike twenty years ago.

With one million pounds standing to her credit in the Bank of England, with youth, health, beauty, and the world at her feet, she knew as little of life's darker side as she had known on that stormy February night when the mother who bore her had dropped her cross and gone out into the mysteries of the Great Beyond.

She had never been told the full horrors of that tragical tale—she knew only that her father had met his death by some violent means, that her mother had loved him too devotedly to survive the blow, and had died shortly after, and as the subject was such a painful one to Lord Glandore, she accepted this meager account and refrained from seeking the particulars.

Not that the old earl *could* have given them in full, for the promise Lady Morford had made to herself at the time of the tragedy, she faithfully kept to the end of life.

With the single exception of Martha Boggs, there was not a soul at Glandore Court who had ever heard of that other child; and when, sixteen years after her arrival in England with little Inez, the Lady Clara Morford died, practically the secret of Kingdon Catheron's twin daughters died with her.

Her death was the first and only grief Inez Catheron had ever known; but the sorrows of sixteen are soon forgotten, particularly in such a life as lay before her from that hour.

With the death of Lady Morford, Inez—as her mother before her—was placed under the chaperonage of Lord Glandore's other sister, the Countess of Elsdale, and “brought out” at the age of eighteen.

Her *debut* had been a pronounced success, and her beauty, together with her vast possessions, had conspired to make her the social star of the season.

Within six months she had refused half a score of offers, and was generally envied by all the marriageable misses of Vanity Fair.

She passed through her first season “heart-whole and fancy free;” but, in the beginning of her second, fate

threw into her path an impoverished young nobleman—Lord Alaric Keith—whose estate, known as Lancedene, was one of the most beautiful in Devonshire, but who had spent the greater part of his time looking after some mining interests in Wales, in the hope of not only cutting down expenses at “home,” but of raising sufficient money to clear off the mortgages upon it—and what more fate did when it threw this impecunious young nobleman into Inez Catheron’s path, let the future pages of this reveal.

For many minutes the old earl sat in his favorite easy-chair and watched her with a smile of loving pride as she stood there in the window, looking pensively out on the spreading acres of Glandore Court, where the fast-declining sunlight lay in broad bands of ruddy gold on field and flood and trees; then, in a low, bantering way:

“ ‘Where art thou now, my beloved?
List’ning I wait for thy call!’ ”

he softly hummed.

“See anything of the carriage yet, Inez? You’ve been standing there like a maiden all forlorn for over ten minutes now. Can’t you spare your old ‘grand-dad’ one single thought, or must your precious Alaric claim every one of them until dinner-time?”

Miss Catheron started guiltily, and a sweet, swift color rushed over her beautiful face as she turned and laughed back at him.

“Grandpa, you ought to be indicted as an incorrigible tease!” she said, with a pretty pout. “Anybody might think, from hearing you talk, that I went to the window for the purpose of looking for the carriage, and that Lord Keith was the sole occupant of my thoughts day and night.”

“Well, isn’t he, my dear?”—laughingly.

“Of course he isn’t, because—— What are you laughing at now?”

“Nothing, my dear--nothing!” responded the old earl. “I was just thinking of Falstaff’s words: ‘Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying!’ If you’ve had ten consecutive thoughts without that precious young beggar claiming at least eight of them, for the past six months, I have only to say that all signs and indications are empty shams, and I’m a Dogberry!”

“Grandpa, will you stop teasing?”

“Teasing, my dear?—teasing the future Lady Keith? Perish the dastardly thought! I only want to know when we’re to order in the carpenters and upholsterers to make the necessary changes here—for I’ll be shot before I’ll let

the young rascal take you away from Glandore Court to live."

Miss Catheron gave her white shoulders a petulant shrug, and, walking over to the piano, ran her fingers over the keys.

"If you *won't* stop teasing me I shall drown your voice *this way!*" she said, laughingly, her eyes sparkling, and her face warm with blushes. "I think you are counting your chickens before they are hatched, Grandpa Glandore. How do *you* know that Lord Keith cares a straw about me, I should like to know? I'm sure he has never hinted such a thing to me."

"Possibly not—as yet!"—jokingly. "But he *will!* You should have seen how the young jackanapes behaved when I invited him to make one of our house-party the day we left Belgravia. Positively, my dear, I thought he was going to embrace me. He laughed and blushed like a girl, and wrung my hand as though it were a pump handle. Signs and indications do not fail in *that* direction, I'll be sworn. So we may confidently expect Keith to make a rapid development in the 'green-and-yellow sickness' under our Kentish skies—no place like Kent for that sort of thing, you know—and to ask for your heart and hand before our house-party breaks up and the London season re-opens."

"And pray, how do you know that I will accept him if he does?"—archly. "Come, sir, you are so very wise, just answer me that question, if you please."

"Let *that* answer it for me," returned Lord Glandore, pointing to a mirror. "Look into that and see if the face it reflects looks like the face of a woman who means to say 'No' to Alaric Keith. Pooh! don't try to hoodwink *me*, young lady. Why, you're over ears in love with the rascal, and I—well, upon my soul, I'm glad of it. Keith is one of the best fellows alive; and, even if he hasn't five hundred pounds to his name, I'd sooner have him for my grandson than a member of the royal family. There! that's enough, isn't it? Let the rascal woo you and win you as fast as he likes. I give my consent beforehand."

Miss Catheron opened her lips to reply, but at that moment the drapery was swept back from one of the arches, a faint breath of perfume floated through the room, and Lady Blanche Hay, gowned in a sumptuous "arrangement" of silver and heliotrope silk, glided forward with a smile of ineffable sweetness.

CHAPTER XI.

LADY BLANCHE HAY.

A PRETTY, *petite* brunette, of three-and-twenty, with flashing hazel eyes, a lovely scarlet mouth, a complexion like old ivory, softened by the faintest gleams of rose, a figure that was as near perfection as nature, or Monsieur Worth, knew how to make it; a smile like a seraph's, a voice like "vocal velvet," and the subtle, indescribable charm of a subtly charming woman.

That was a crude description of her ladyship, as she came fluttering forward, unfurling her feather fan, and laughing a sweet, flute-like laugh that dimpled her dainty face, and filled the room with softest music.

"Am I *de trop*?" she said, archly, pausing between Lord Glandore and his granddaughter, and softly turning upon the former the light of her dark, andalusian eyes. "Have I interrupted that most sacred of things—a domestic conference! If so, speak, oh, silent oracle, and I will discreetly vanish!"

"What! and rob us of the sunshine 'while it is yet day?'" returned the old earl, gallantly. "We have no conference—Inez and I—in which your ladyship may not share, and be regarded as a most welcome addition."

"Well turned, *mon ami*!" smiled Lady Blanche, softly tapping his shoulder with her fan, and appropriating a seat near his. "Even that potent destroyer of a good disposition—the gout—is powerless to put Lord Glandore's gallantry to rout, I see! Miss Catheron, I envy you the possession of such a perennially good-natured companion. But bless me! what a treasure of a maid you must have, to be sure. I flattered myself that I had made my toilet so quickly, I should be the first to appear in the drawing-room before dinner was announced, and yet I find you dressed and here before me."

"I have been here since six o'clock, and it is now half past," returned Inez, quietly. "Dinner will not be served for an hour yet—we have deferred it beyond the accustomed time in order that we may sit down a *completed* party to-night, Lady Blanche!"

Lady Hay arched her delicate black brows, inquiringly, and, sinking back in the velvet embrace of her chair, languidly swayed her feathered fan before her pretty *brune* face.

"Ah! then we *are* to be a completed party to-night?" she softly said, her face flushing a trifle, and a faint unsteadiness creeping into her voice, strive how she would to keep it sweet and level. "We have been ten for three

days, and now the charm of the odd number is to be added. I was not aware that Lord Keith meant to honor us so soon. May I ask when you heard from him?"

"This afternoon," returned Inez. "He telegraphed Lord Glandore that he would arrive upon the six o'clock train, and the carriage has gone over to Leith station to meet him. You are acquainted with Lord Keith, are you not, Lady Blanche? I know that you spent the last season in Paris—which, by the way, was his first appearance in society for several years—but I fancy I have heard you mention him. Have I not?"

The pink glow deepened on Lady Blanche's cheeks, then faded slowly, and, knowing that her face had become pale, she held her fan between it and the light, as though to shade her eyes.

"Yes, I have had the pleasure of meeting his lordship," she said, with affected nonchalance. "But it was the merest sort of an acquaintance, and I dare say that he has long since forgotten the incident of our meeting. It was at—let me see—Carn Ruth, or some other place on the Welsh coast that I met him, shortly after Lord Hay died, and while I was existing the six months of social seclusion which society demands of widowhood. I remember Lord Keith as a very handsome and very charming young man of five-and-twenty years, but I dare say that he has forgotten me!"

"As if *any* man could forget Lady Blanche!" dropped in Lord Glandore, laughingly. "It is rank heresy to mention such a thing."

But her ladyship made no response.

She felt that the pallor on her face was steadily increasing, and was vainly cudgeling her brains for some excuse to quit the room, when the welcoming sound of laughter upon the stairs directed the conversation into another channel; and presently the remainder of the house-party came trooping in, headed by the Countess of Elsdale, a stately, white-haired *grande dame*, in black satin and diamonds.

"Inez! Where are you, Inez?" exclaimed, blithely, Miss Muriel Ruthven, a sparkling brunette, gowned in a dinner-dress of lemon silk, and wearing, of course, the conventional pearls of girlhood.

"Ah, there you are!" she added, gayly, as she caught sight of Miss Catheron, and fluttered forward, all life and sparkle, as was her wont. "Such a delicious discovery! I really believe I shall have to double my maid's wages for making it. Only think, dear! A party of gypsies has pitched its tents in the woods of Bracken Hollow. Real old-fashioned gypsies, who ask you to cross their palms

with silver and get a peep into futurity and all that almost obsolete gammon which nobody finds nowadays, except it be on the stage, or in the columns of a 'penny dreadful!' Marie says she saw them, and they are actually picturesquely dressed, and really *clean*! There! what do you think of that?"

"Think!" interpolated Lord Glandore. "Why, that we'd better see that the stables are locked and guarded while the rascals remain, and that you young ladies had better be chary of wandering about without male escort—particularly if you have any valuable jewelry upon your persons. We can't prevent the rascals prowling about Glandore Court after dark, I dare say; but I'll give orders to have them thrashed if they come here in the daylight."

"Vandal!" exclaimed Lady Grace Merton, another of the party. "Are you going to join forces with the countess and warn us not to cross the social chasm, even by way of a brief experiment? Miss Ruthven and I have been planning to have the gentlemen ride over to Bracken Glen with a command for the sorceress of the tribe to present herself at the Court, so that we may have our fortunes told by a shriveled old crone. I suppose"—laughingly—"there is a shriveled old crone in the party, isn't there, Muriel? It wouldn't be the genuine gypsy camp of stage and story without one. But Lady Elsdale was the first to discourage us, and now *you* are added to the list, Lord Glandore. Inez, dear, apply your persuasive powers to the earl, and convince him what a fascinating experience it promises to be!"

"I am afraid I could not do so with any degree of sincerity," returned Miss Catheron, with a smile. "I dislike gypsies, as a class, and the sight of one acts upon Lord Glandore like a red flag upon a raging bull."

"Oh, then, that puts a quietus upon the affair," responded Miss Ruthven, gayly. "Of course we wouldn't dream of visiting *them*, so there's an end to the fortune-telling, and a shilling saved all around."

"Better put it in the poor box, Miss Ruthven, and *guess* at your future," laughed Sir Charles Enderby. "I dare say you'll come as near to it as Lady Merton's shriveled old crone."

Then the conversation took a bantering turn; and leaving them in the midst of their raillery, Lady Blanche Hay slipped out upon the great marble terrace which skirted the mansion, and with twilight aslant upon her troubled face, began pacing up and down, and nervously whipping her left hand with the sticks of her closed fan.

"And so we are to meet again—Alaric Keith and I!" she

muttered, shutting her teeth hard and breathing through her nostrils in a dull, labored way. "I'm to look again into the eyes of the man who spurned me that night in Wales, as though he really knew the history of my past, and what I was when Norris Hay found me dancing for my living in a fourth-rate variety theater in New York. My Heaven! what a fool I was to throw myself at Alaric Keith's head in that crazy manner! But I was so young, and I loved him with such passionate *abandon*. Lord Hay's death had left me rich, I knew that Alaric was poor, knew that he needed money to clear off the mortgages upon Lancedene, and—I think I must have gone mad for love of him; but mad or sane, no matter—I threw myself at his feet, I told him that I loved him, I asked him to marry me and let my fortune save Lancedene from the hammer, and then— Ah, Heaven! shut out the memory of what followed! Sometimes in the dead of the night I hear his contemptuous words, see the look of disgust on his face as he turned and left me, never again to look into my eyes nor let his hand touch mine from that moment to this!

"And so you love him, do you, my puritanical Inez?" she went on, in a voice of suppressed passion; "you love him, and you look upon *me* as 'the most odious creature in the universe!' I wonder what you would have said had you known how long I was behind the curtain of the arch, and how much of your conversation I overheard? I should tell you, if I dared, how little love there is lost between us, you white-skinned saint! I should like to tell you how easy it was to dislike you before, and how easy it is to hate you now, because you are *dear* to him! And so I am to see him again, and see him a woman's slave! How will he meet me, I wonder? Will he carry his scorn of me to this late day? or will he strike a truce and let the past be buried between our two selves? Let fate decide—for fate only can—but be his greeting what it will, let Alaric Keith beware of the woman he spurned that night in Wales!"

The rumbling of carriage wheels put a period to her wrathful soliloquy, and glancing up, she saw that the Glandore equipage had swung out of the drive into the paved courtyard; and facing about sharply as it came to a halt before the terrace steps, she found herself looking straight into the handsome, dark eyes of Alaric, Lord Keith.

CHAPTER XII.

"COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE."

It had not changed—that splendid face—since last she saw it, and the twilight, shining down upon it, revealed it to her clearly. The broad, high forehead; the slender, slightly aquiline nose; the firm, square chin; the clearly cut mouth, shaded by a dark, heavy, silk-soft mustache; the clear, hazel eyes, the curling, brown hair, and the ruddy, healthful color in cheeks and lips—all were as they had been four years ago, and the knowledge of it cut her in spite of herself.

His lordship had seen and recognized her the very instant the carriage halted—that she realized; but before she could fairly decide whether his look was one of indifference, or one of displeasure, at meeting her again—and here—the great double doors of the Court were thrown open, and the whole merry party came trooping out to meet the welcome guest.

His lordship sprung down from the carriage, his whole face lighting up as he beheld Inez; and acknowledging the noisy greeting of his friends, hurried to Miss Catheron's side, and grasped in his own the two white hands she held out to him.

"Welcome to Glandore Court, Lord Keith!" she said, lifting her clear, truthful eyes to his with a smile of sweet sincerity. "You cannot tell how pleased we all were to receive your telegram—a week sooner than we expected."

"You are glad, then, to see me?" murmured his lordship, sinking his voice a trifle, and unconsciously pressing the little hands that lay so quietly in his. "It is very kind of you to say it, Miss Catheron. One so rarely meets with a heartfelt welcome when one puts in an appearance a week earlier than anticipated; but I trust—nay, I am sure—I may not doubt the sincerity of yours?"

"You may not, indeed," she frankly answered. "We were all very glad to know that you had decided not to remain in London another week, during this warm weather, and doubly glad that you had decided to become one of us so soon. Sir Harry Charteris has been in ecstasies ever since he heard that you were *en route*."

"Has he, indeed?" responded Lord Keith, with a bluff laugh. "Charteris, dear fellow, permit me to thank you for your disinterested sentiment. I was not aware that I had such an ardent admirer. Were you really languishing for your friend, or smarting to run me another string at billiards, and prove to the world at large that there really was a man whom you could double discount three

times running? Have at you, rascal! I've been practicing lately for the express purpose of turning the tables on you!"

"Don't!" returned Sir Harry, laughingly. "Turn the *count*—that's enough. The other's too laborious for this hot weather, old man. Awfully glad to see you, though, Keith—blest if I'm not."

"Thanks," responded his lordship, with a laugh. "And now, if I may be permitted to excuse myself, I'll do my best not to keep you waiting for dinner. I know I am wofully late, Lady Elsdale, for I have been 'pumping' the coachman, and posting myself in the rules and regulations of the Court beforehand. Ladies, will you pardon me?"

He turned as he spoke and stepped toward the liveried servant, who stood waiting to conduct him to the suit of apartments he was to occupy during his stay at the Court, when Miss Catheron caught sight of Lady Blanche Hay standing a trifle apart from the others, and recollecting what her ladyship had said regarding the possibility of his lordship having forgotten her, she stepped forward, and laid a soft, detaining hand upon his sleeve.

"Forgive me, but I fear I have been amiss in my duty, Lord Keith," she gently said. "This is Lady Blanche Hay, and I fear that you are as forgetful as myself. Lady Blanche, Lord Keith."

Her ladyship smiled sweetly, and held out one small ringed hand.

"I fear that I have made so little impression upon Lord Keith, he has long ceased to remember me," she said quietly. "Some incidents of our lives are so soon forgotten, you know."

"I have not forgotten Lady Blanche Hay," returned his lordship, with just the faintest suspicion of hauteur as he bent over her little white hand, and if her ladyship could have turned that hand into a deadly viper at that minute, she would have been only too well pleased.

"So he holds it against me still, but is too much of a man to betray me," she muttered to herself as his lordship excused himself and followed the servant indoors. "I shall have little chance to do him harm, and besides that, people will begin to conjecture if he holds aloof from me and treats me in that frosty manner to the end of my visit. I must mend that without delay, and do something to win his confidence and heal the breach between us before—I beg your pardon, Lady Elsdale. You were saying?"

"I was suggesting that we return to the drawing-room to await Lord Keith's reappearance," responded the old

countess. "Delightfully cool as it is out here, the dusk is fast deepening, and the air of our Kentish evenings is not conducive to good health. Shall we go in, ladies?"

"By all means!" they responded in chorus; and following her lead, trooped back into the drawing-room and re-joined the old earl.

The countess rang and ordered lights; the wondrous chandelier burst forth into a blaze of sparkling glory, the curtains were drawn, the piano opened, and between music and laughter and good-humored chatter, the time passed pleasantly until Lord Keith made his appearance, dressed for dinner.

His lordship was one of the few men who really look at their best in that barbarous affair known as masculine "full dress," and, handsome as he had looked in his gray tweed traveling suit, there was something about him now that seemed to dwarf the others into insignificance.

His six feet of square-shouldered, magnificently proportioned manhood was well adapted to the "swallow-tail" monstrosity, and he had never looked handsomer or more kingly to Inez Catheron and Lady Blanche Hay than he did at that moment when he stalked in and bore down on the old earl with his swinging, soldierly stride, his erect head, and his flashing dark eyes.

"God bless the boy, what a grip he has!" exclaimed the old earl, as Lord Keith grasped his hand and wrung it warmly. "Talk about the deterioration of the British aristocracy! why, your muscles are like steel, you rascal, and your fingers grip like a vice. Welcome, Keith—welcome a thousand times. I am heartily glad you have come. No! you needn't put on any extra force, or I sha'n't be able to use my hand in a fortnight. Respect my stiff joints, you young savage, if you *do* fight shy of my gouty foot. I'm seven-and-seventy, and you make me painfully aware of it!"

His lordship laughed, and made some well-timed response; then the conversation became general, and in the midst of it dinner was announced.

The old earl struggled to his feet, conquered a pardonable desire to get off them again as speedily as possible, gave his arm to Lady Blanche Hay, and, with as much dignity as is consistent with a mild attack of the gout, led the way to the dining-room.

Lord Keith, naturally enough, found his way to Inez, lingered to let the others take precedence, and walked slowly out in the rear of the van.

"May I say that you are looking superb to-night?" he softly murmured, as they crossed the corridor. "It is a breach of etiquette, certainly; but one is so happy some-

times, that the heart abuses all codes, and gives license to the lips."

"It doesn't offend me," she frankly answered. "I am glad if I please you, Lord Keith."

"Please me? Ah! I wish I dared say how much! May I hope to do so some time, Miss Catheron? or will it give offense?"

"I do not think you would try to offend me, Lord Keith," she answered, with a smile, "and unless you do try, it will be difficult to make me angry."

His lordship caught his breath with a thrill of unspeakable hope, and I am afraid that the heart and the lips would have done more serious abuse than formerly to the social codes had not the great double doors of the dining-room swung open suddenly and brought him to a sense of the eternal fitness of things, and the eternal unfitness of a lover's rhapsody in the presence of soups and salads and a dozen pairs of mortal eyes.

So the tale was left untold for a time, and, leading Miss Catheron to her place at the table, he took his seat beside her, and dinner became a reality, where it had previously been but a name.

From first to last, however, Lady Blanche Hay kept a close watch upon Lord Keith.

She had not heard what had passed between him and Miss Catheron; but, in that moment when the doors had swung open, and the light streamed forth upon them, she had had time to catch a glimpse of his attitude and the expression of his countenance, and she made a very clever guess at the truth.

For a long time she discreetly held her peace, but, like a smoldering volcano, which sometimes must burst forth, her spite, fed by the happiness of those she hated, found voice at last:

"How happy our dear girl looks to-night!" she said, in an audible "aside," to Lady Elsdale. "One would think she had received a new baptism of beauty and an extra consignment of happiness. Surely there is not another such a face in all England to-night!"

An expression of annoyance flashed over Miss Catheron's countenance as all eyes were raised to it, but before her ladyship could add to her confusion:

"Oh, that reminds me of an odd experience I encountered on my way to the Court," interrupted Lord Keith. "I call it an 'experience' because at the time it seemed so remarkably real, but I dare say it was only the result of fancy after all. Charteris, you 'go in' for spiritualism and spook-ism, and fetches and all that sort of thing, so

this affair will interest you. Probably you can explain the delusion, for I'm blessed if *I* can!"

"Let's have it, then, and give Charty a chance to strut his brief hour upon an explanatory stage!" broke in Sir Charles Enderby. "He's a howling success in propounding the theory of materializing shades of the defunct, so if you've run across anything in the spook line, Keith——"

"I have!" interrupted his lordship, laughingly. "Saw one this evening as we were riding up from Leith Station."

"'Imperial Cæsar dead and turned to clay,' etc.," responded Sir Charles. "What did the apparition look like, Keith?"

"Like Miss Catheron! To be emphatic, Endy, it was so wonderfully like her, that I actually thought for the moment that it was really she," returned Lord Keith, earnestly. "It happened just after the carriage entered up the road leading through the woods, in the vicinity of a place which the coachman told me was called Bracken Hollow. Twilight was fast deepening, and I was leaning back in the carriage smoking and indulging in a sort of reverie, when all of a sudden I fancied I heard a voice murmur faintly: 'Again, ah, Heaven, again!' Naturally enough I turned in the direction of the sound, and there, framed in the bushes, I saw Miss Catheron's face, as clearly as I ever saw anything in my life. I started as though to leap out and join her—for I assure you I really believed it was she—when as suddenly as it came 'whisk!' it vanished, and there was nothing before me but leaves. There, Charteris, what do you think of that, you prophet?"

"Your cigar was too strong!" suggested Sir Harry.

"You had been thinking about her!" laughed Lord Glandore.

"Or you'd taken something 'heady' on your way up from London!" dropped in Lord George Ruthven, whereat there was a general laugh; and the countess, perceiving that Sir Henry Charteris was about to launch forth into a spiritualistic dissertation, discreetly gave the signal for the ladies to retire, and fluttering back to the drawing-room, they left the gentlemen to carry on their discussion over the walnuts and the wine.

Chagrined at having given the conversation a rollicking turn instead of an annoying one, Lady Blanche Hay excused herself from joining the ladies for a time, dispatched a servant to secure her a wrap, and folding it over her head and shoulders, went out to cool off her wrath by a walk on the terrace.

But walking on the terrace kept her within earshot of the merry party within; and as her ladyship was decid-

edly "out of sort" to-night, she gathered up her gleaming draperies, ran down the steps into the spacious grounds, and seeking the paved walk, which ran parallel with the driveway, pattering briskly along in the direction of the gates, giving free vent to her tongue and temper meanwhile.

Night had long since shut in, and a full moon rode high over the clustering tree-tops, some faint gleams of its silvery splendor striking down upon her ladyship's pretty, malicious face as she pattered onward, her silken gown gathered up to keep it from brushing the dewy foliage, and her dainty silken slippers emitting not the shadow of a sound.

For fifteen minutes she kept walking onward, muttering to herself, and wrathfully shaking her dark head until the diamonds in her hair and ears and on her soft, dusk throat blinked in the moonlight and surrounded her with a million broken rainbows.

Still silence reigned above and about her; she was far out of sight and sound of the merry party at the house—far out of sight of any living thing, she would have said, had she stopped to think of it, but she *didn't* think, and the knowledge of her position never forced itself upon her until, without hint or warning, the brawny figure of a man, with a brace of pheasants in his hand, sprung out of the thicket, made a movement to bolt across the path and escape with his prize, and so came face to face with her.

All in a moment the truth burst upon her. The man was a gypsy—a poacher—she was alone in the grounds, with all those blinking diamonds glinting in the moonlight, and he——

Almost as the thought crossed her mind he dropped the brace of birds, leaped forward, and clutched her by the wrist.

"Mercy!" gulped her ladyship, feeling that her last hour had come, and terror rendering her voice almost inaudible. "Don't kill me. Take my jewels, but only spare my life."

"I don't want your life—I want your name!" wheezed the man, excitedly. "Speak to me; speak, for God's sake! Am I drunk or dreaming, or can likenesses be so wonderful? Answer me truly, or it will go hard with you. What is your name, woman? Speak!"

"I am called Lady Blanche Hay, and——"

"D—— what you're called; I want the truth. Speak, or I'll throttle you! You are an American?"

"Yes."

"And your real name is Maggie Talford!"

Her ladyship recoiled, with a faint, wondering cry.

"How do you know that?" she gasped. "Who are you, that you call me by a name I have not borne since childhood?"

"Who am I?" responded the man, giving her a contemptuous fling. "Not o' your kind now perhaps, and yet you owe your very life to me. I am called to-night Marco, the Gypsy King, but in the days of your childhood, *Lady Blanche Hay*, I was known as Mark Talford—your father!"

CHAPTER XIII.

CHIEFLY EXPLANATORY.

FOR some moments not a sound broke the stillness which had fallen after Mark Talford made that startling declaration and ceased speaking, and the tableau which ensued would have delighted the heart of a dramatist of the modern realistic school.

Ghastly white to the very lips, my lady cowered away in speechless terror at the sullen, forbidding face of the man before her—her slim, jeweled hands tightly shut, her eyes dilated and her very breathing stilled—then, as though the full import of the thing had at last burned itself into her bewildered brain, she suddenly uttered one faint, gasping cry, and tottering backward, leaned heavily against a tree.

"My father!" she cried out in a dull, lifeless voice. "You, Mark Talford? You, my father?"

"Even I—vagabond and gypsy as I am!" he answered sullenly. "It is hardly such a pedigree as the Lady Blanche Hay would care to have the world know, but it is true, nevertheless. I should have known you had I met you in the wilds of a desert. I should have known you even though you had *denied* your identity and repudiated your name; for your face is your mother's face over again, and no power on earth could ever make *me* forget that."

"And she—my mother," murmured Lady Blanche, huskily; "is she a gypsy, too? and—and is she here with you?"

Marco shook his head slowly, and my lady heard, or fancied she heard, the faint, tremulous note of a subdued sigh.

"Would to Heaven that she were," he answered huskily. "Not for the sake of the child who forsook us, but for mine alone; I would give half my life to have her living still. I would have something to care for, then, something to love, even though her poor, shattered mind could never be retrieved, or the memory of the tragedy which

wrecked it be lifted from her life. She is dead, poor creature—dead and gone these ten years. She died in an American madhouse; and, if there was any brightness in my life, any tenderness in my heart, both were buried in my Maggie's grave. She was my Heaven, my life, my all, as I was hers, and yet"—his face darkening and hardening in the moonlight, and a note of scathing contempt ringing through his voice—"and yet out of such love as ours was born such an ingrate as you!"

My lady winced under this stinging rebuke, and a wave of color swept over her pretty, dusky face.

"Spare me your reproaches," she murmured, sullenly; "and remember, before you condemn me, what a dreary, loveless youth was mine, and how little you tried to brighten it. To the age of eight years I was the inmate of a poorhouse—beaten, half starved, abused in every way, and yet I had a father in the world. They told me at the poorhouse that you were a worthless vagabond, a cut-throat—all that was vile and infamous, and I must learn to forget you. I had been an inmate of that dreadful place ever since I was three years of age. I knew of you nothing but your name, for you never came to see me; and in the face of *that* you tax me with being an ingrate to a man who gave me no proof that he wasted even one poor thought upon his only child."

"I could do no better," retorted Marco. "Could I come to you when the laws of the land prevented me? I was no freer than you, my lass, for the years you spent in that poorhouse, I passed behind the walls of a prison."

"They did not tell me that."

"But it is true, nevertheless. I was crazed with a desire to reach you, and one night, in a fit of desperation, I made an effort to escape. I was discovered by one of the guards, and a terrible struggle ensued. I threw myself upon him and beat him into unconsciousness; but before I could benefit by that act, the noise of the struggle had brought other guards down upon me. I was surrounded, seized, whipped like a dog, and forced to pay the penalty of my rashness. Instead of freedom, my folly brought me an extension of my time, for I not alone lost those months which would have been deducted from my original sentence as a reward for good behavior, but I was convicted of a murderous assault upon a keeper, adjudged a criminal too dangerous to be set at large until subdued, and at the expiration of my first term of imprisonment, I found another awaiting me.

"When both were served, and I was once more a free man, I flew to the place where the law had placed you, only

to find that you had been bound out—it took months to discover where.

“At length I did discover it, and, after tramping and begging for many weeks, made my way to the place, only to meet another failure. You had disappeared—run away some four months previous, they told me—and had gone, no one knew where.

“Still I did not despair. After many and fruitless efforts, I found work at length, and every dollar I earned was divided between those I loved. Half of it went to the insane asylum, to insure better treatment for your mother, and the other half was spent in advertising for you.

“For years I kept that practice up, always hoping to succeed in my efforts to find you, but always meeting with failure, until, one day, when my reckoning told me you were in your seventeenth year, I received a letter from your hand, asking who was the advertiser, and why he so diligently sought you. I sat down, delirious with joy, and wrote a reply. I told you that the advertiser was your father, and that I wished to reclaim my lost child.

“I shall never forget the answer which came back to me. In a few heartless words you gave me to understand that you had no desire to meet or know me—that it would be useless for me to attempt to discover your whereabouts, for, by the time I received your letter, you would have left the place from whence you had written it, and, as you were known to no one by the name of Maggie Talford, your whereabouts could not possibly be traced. You were doing well enough as you were, you said, and had no intention of supporting an idle, dissolute father, whose very name you had forever discarded.

“I read that letter, twisted it up, and threw it in the fire, and from that moment I ceased to advertise, and ceased to know one tender feeling for the child who had repudiated me! You were as dead to me as was the mother who bore you, and whose broken life had ended under the roof of a madhouse!

“Some weeks later there came to my humble home a messenger from the tribe of English gypsies over which I now rule. He told me that for years the Romany tribes had been seeking the whereabouts of my mother; had at last heard of her marriage to a man named Talford, and through that medium had been enabled to trace me.

“I had always known that my mother was a gypsy, and had been called Hulda, the Weasel; but I now, for the first time, discovered what was her real rank. Death having cut off all other heirs, she had succeeded to the Romany throne. In a word, at the time she died she was queen over all the gypsy tribes, and I, as her direct descendant,

now became king. I had nothing to bind me to America, for all ties were severed when you dropped out of my life; and so, a fortnight later, I sailed away to fill my new position.

"With that act Mark Talford ceased to exist, and, from the wreck of his broken life, there arose Marco, the gypsy king—a wanderer and a vagabond in the eyes of the world, but still the father of my Lady Blanche Hay!"

His voice—sometimes sullen, sometimes pathetic—ceased here with a slow, deriding laugh, and again silence fell.

Her ladyship looked at him for a moment—not certain of her ground, and not sure but what he might publish the relationship, and repay her heartlessness that way—then, with a soft, gliding movement, she came nearer, and dropped one small, sparkling hand upon his arm.

"If they had told me all this—if I had even dreamed that your purpose was not to degrade me, I might have acted—*would* have acted differently, *father!*" she said, in her glib, sweet-sounding voice. "But from the pictures they drew of you in the poorhouse, I was led to believe you a man who would heap every indignity upon me, so that it brought you the means of leading a life of idleness and drunken debauchery; and, oh! can you blame me that I dreaded being dragged down to such a life, when everything that was bright and beautiful was just opening out before me?"

"The woman to whom I was bound out by the people at the poorhouse beat and abused me so terribly that, in a moment of desperation, I ran away, and after enduring many privations, at length reached New York, where, for a long and dreary time, I supported myself by selling papers, and slept, with others of the rabble, in alleys or wagons or under whatever shelter Heaven saw fit to offer me.

"Time slipped on, and I grew from childhood to girlhood in this miserable, dog-like existence. At length fortune threw me in the path of a man who managed a theater on the Bowery. He saw me, thought me pretty, and—well, to make a long story short, he taught me a few steps of a break-down, and brought me out upon the stage under the name of Blanche de Courcy.

"I managed to make a hit, and it was all plain sailing after that. I studied hard to improve the farce of an education which the charity commissioners had given me in my childhood, rose rapidly in my profession, and began to command a good salary.

"One night, in the zenith of my fame, the late Lord Norris Hay came to the theater where I was playing, saw

me, fell in love with me, and that ended my stage experience.

"He was a dissipated, broken-down wreck of a man, who had run every vice to its lair; society in his own land had almost tabooed him on account of his notorious escapades, and he took revenge upon it by marrying me. I didn't love him—I couldn't love him, but I was a true and faithful wife to him while he lived, and as I had great hopes for my future, I induced him to engage private tutors for me, to give me at least the skim-milk of a polite education, and, to his surprise, instead of shocking society, when he at length brought me to England and introduced me, I managed to make an impression, and have maintained it ever since.

"My husband did not like that—he was not a man to like anything to please the people who were shocked by his behavior—and I think, had he not died soon after his return to England, he would have vented his spite upon those who had consented to receive me by telling them that they had been for months associating with a woman who danced break-downs at the theater in the vilest of American cities. By that means he would certainly have closed all doors against me, but fate was considerate enough to save me from exposure by encompassing his death.

"He was killed at a fox-hunt, and I, as his widow and only existing relative, inherited a fortune of fifty thousand pounds.

"I am, therefore, amply able, *father*, to assist you in any reasonable way, if you will only consent to do nothing by which I may lose the foothold I have obtained in society; and if you will let me rectify the miserable mistake I made in regard to your character, I will do all in my power to make your life a pleasant one. If you prefer a home in London to sleeping 'in the hotel of the beautiful stars;' if you desire to leave the gypsies and give up your roving, vagabond life——"

"I don't desire it!" he cut, in sharply. "For twenty years I have nursed a grudge and dreamed of having revenge for the sufferings I have endured, and beyond *that* I want nothing!"

"Revenge!" murmured her ladyship, in a faint, palpitating voice. "Revenge upon whom? Oh, father, father! now that I have explained all, surely you will not hold malice toward *me*?"

"You? No!" he answered, huskily. "I could not strike you, if I would, for your likeness to your mother would make you sacred, even though I could forget you are my child. I thought that the fire was out, but some

faint sparks must have lingered; for, oh, child, child, they have rekindled to-night, and my heart leaps to warmth and life again. Maggie, my own, my darling! I love you, after all!"

Her ladyship crept forward with a low, glad, cry, and taking her into his arms he bent and kissed her pretty, smiling face.

"My darling, I wouldn't harm one hair of this dear head," he gently said. "My vengeance is for one in whose veins runs the blood which wrought my ruin, and your mother's death. Think of it, child, and let it turn your heart to gall, your love for her—if you have any—to the bitterness of death, and your friendship to relentless hate. Like you, she is a woman—and like you she has wealth; but, hereafter, when you look into her eyes, remember that her father sent yours to prison; remember that he drove your mother to a madhouse, and mine to her death, and say to yourself night and day: 'I am a gypsy's daughter, and I will have revenge!'"

"And this woman!" murmured Lady Blanche, excitedly. "Do I know her? Have I met her, father? Who is she?"

"Who is she?" he repeated, in a bleak, bitter voice, his face darkening as he whirled about and pointed in the direction of the distant mansion. "The mistress of that house, the owner of these acres, Inez Catheron, the Earl of Glandore's granddaughter, and a *born* enemy to Mark Talford's child!"

"Inez Catheron!" exclaimed Lady Blanche, in a voice of mingled joy and surprise. "Merciful Heaven! do you mean to tell me that her father wronged *you*? What did he do? It will be a pleasure to have some deeper cause for hatred against her than the grudge I bear her now, and, if you speak truly, it will be a joy to work with you for Inez Catheron's downfall. Oh, tell me what he did—tell me all—all!"

Marco had just opened his lips to reply, but at that moment the sound of a man's bluff, breezy laugh floated through the stillness, and, hastily snatching up the brace of pheasants, the gypsy king sprung into the brushwood.

"Come to-morrow to the gypsy encampment in Bracken Hollow!" he whispered, as he disappeared. "I will await you from morning to midnight—come when you can!"

Then, soundless as a shadow, he waved his hand and vanished, and my lady stood under the trees of the Oak Walk, silent, motionless, alone.

The sound of chattering voices and pattering footsteps recalled her from the reverie into which she had fallen;

and presently, just as she had started to retrace her steps to the house, Sir Harry Charteris came into view with Miss Ruthven clinging to his arm.

"Behold! the lost sheep is found!" he laughed, as he caught sight of her ladyship. "We are the scouting party sent to rescue you from all manner of imaginary evils, Lady Blanche. It is so long since you went—according to the ladies—to take a turn up and down the terrace, and then 'vanished,' like Pepper's Ghost, 'into an awful state of nothingness and nowhere,' that Miss Ruthven and I volunteered to look you up. Couldn't tell, you know, but what you'd wandered off into the grounds and been 'busked' by one of those poor beggars who couldn't get you any other way."

"No, I have been neither stolen nor lost!" returned her ladyship, with marked significance, meant for the ears of the man who was, she knew, crouching behind the brushwood where he could hear and understand. "On the contrary, I have just found my way and been recovered!"

"Then let the recoverer do the honors!" laughed the young baronet, tendering her his disengaged arm. "Permit me to sandwich myself and lead you back to the drawing-room. Lord Glandore is in a state of loneliness bordering upon melancholia, and nothing will save his tottering reason but your ladyship's instant appearance upon the scene."

"Lord Glandore does me too much honor," laughed gayly Lady Blanche, as she accepted the proffered arm. "I shall try to repay both him and Miss Catheron for the interest they are pleased to take in me. I dislike being anybody's debtor, Sir Henry, so I shall strive very hard to leave Glandore Court with an even score when our pleasant house-party disbands!"

CHAPTER XIV.†

A DAUGHTER OF ISHMAEL.

"OH, Zillah, dearest, best beloved, wilt thou not give me hope? Wilt thou not *try* to love me? I give so much, my beautiful, a little will suffice in return. Try to love me, Zillah, only *try*!"

"I cannot, Jock, it isn't in me. I would love thee if I could, my brother, but the stars have spoken, and it may not be!"

It is a pretty scene, wanting in nothing to delight the eye of an artist, or to stir the slumbering senses of a poet.

Overhead, the bright moon pouring down a sheet of luminous liquid splendor that glances along the surrounding hills, silvers the dewy grass and bracken in the deep,

sweet valley, and sparkles like a million diamonds on the brawling stream that breaks in a hundred tiny cascades before it finds its way out of Bracken Hollow to "join the brimming river" at Leith.

The moonlight falls full upon the two figures that stand close to the brawling stream, knee-deep in ferns and flowers, and this is what it shows you:

A brawny, lithe-limbed, copper-skinned fellow, of three-or four-and-twenty, with the unmistakable features and the jet-black hair and mustache of a gypsy; his supple figure arrayed in a shabby suit of black corduroy, a pair of leather leggings buttoned up to his very thighs, a broad-brimmed hat shading his handsome, tawny face, and his long, curling hair brushing the deep collar of coarse, homespun linen, which almost completely covers the shoulders of his black coat.

Beside him stands a woman's figure—a figure that might be a spirit, or a Grecian statue, so still it is, so strangely out of keeping it appears with the nature of its surroundings.

A long, loose robe of soft, lustrous white merino, zoned at the waist with a girdle of dull silver, falls about her in sweeping, statuesque folds of graceful drapery, her bare arms and shoulders gleam in the moonlight like polished ivory, her long, shimmering, golden hair falls to her very waist, and is fettered only by a broad white band, fastened about her head and ornamented by one silver star set in the middle of her forehead; her hands, loosely clasped before her, are full of white wood blossoms; her eyes are upturned, and her whole attitude—the poise of her head, and contour of face and figure—is one of spirituelle beauty and perfect grace.

She turns, and the moonlight, falling full upon her face, shows you the living, breathing counterpart of Inez Catheron, the heiress.

"Go, Jock," she softly says, in a voice so like Miss Catheron's own that the resemblance is simply marvelous; "thou knowest that to-night the moon is at its full, and my devotions alone may claim my thoughts. Speak to me not of earthly love, my brother, when I may alone commune with Him who took my spirit out of one mortal frame to give it back to another."

"But the hour of devotion is long since past, Zillah," interposed Jock, gently. "Thou mayest lay aside thy white robes and be again the gypsy, not the spirit, and mortal men may woo thee. Oh, beloved, I know that thou art far above me, even as *all* things of the other world are above those of this, but still——"

Zillah lifted her slim, white hand and checked his speech.

"I am *not* above you, Jock!" she said, gliding gracefully out of the gypsy mode of expression, and thereby rendering yet more remarkable her likeness to the lady of Glandore Court. "You are next in rank to Marco, and will be king of the Romanies when Heaven sees fit to call *him*, while I—Jock, sometimes I wonder if I really am what all our people call me, 'Zillah, the Spirit'—sometimes I wonder if it may not be possible that Taric and Starlight Bess were deceived when they fancied that Heaven performed such an astounding miracle as the one which has made me famous among all the tribes of our people, and sometimes—oh, Jock! do not despise me for the thought—but sometimes when I compare myself with those about me, I doubt the truth of everything and wonder if I really *am* a gypsy, after all."

"Heaven save thee, Zillah, but thou art surely mad!" exclaimed Jock, in a shocked voice. "Dost thou think that Starlight Bess would have taken such oaths as she did if she did not believe it true that thou wert taken and restored even as she said?"

"*Believe* it? Yes, she might have done that—I do not doubt it; but was it true, after all?"

"As true as those stars are there," he answered, pointing upward. "To the very day when she followed Taric to the grave, she swore to the truth of her statement, and more than that, what wouldst thou? Hast thou not been reared as never gypsy was reared before? Hast thou not been held as something sacred from the eyes of all save the people of thy race?"

"Ay! too sacred," she murmured, with a sigh. "The very honors which have been bestowed upon me have sometimes seemed a curse, and the devotion which surrounds me, like the fetters of a slave. Other women of the tribe may wander where they will, and look upon whom they please, whilst I—— Oh, Jock, I might as well be a prisoner—I might as well have been left to grow up in ignorance—better, perhaps—than to be guarded from the sight of the world after I have been accorded the knowledge which fits me to mingle with it and enjoy its pleasures.

"I dare not venture forth alone, save after dark; and even then I must be closely veiled from the sight of all save gypsies, just as I was compelled to go masked before those who were solicited to teach me the arts of reading and writing, to make me in education what I am believed to be in reality—something above the people with whom my lot is cast. What is this but slavery of the bitterest

type? Why, the lowest of our people has more happiness and more freedom than I."

"But thou canst read, Zillah, and thou hast the companionship of books which speak to thee, but are silent to us."

"Books!" she echoed, bitterly. "What, think you, do they do for me save make my position more unbearable? In books I read of the world—of those blessed women who know what it is to live a life of excitement; to go among their kind, jeweled and gayly robed; to love where they will and when they will; while I am shut up here with uncongenial spirits as though I were a dryad, and content to dwell among trees. Oh, Jock! sometimes my heart yearns for that other life until the emptiness and dreariness of this one almost drives me mad. Oh, to see the world—oh, to know that glorious life of which my books tell me! I pant for it—I pine for it—and I tell you truly, Jock, if I thought I should live this way to the end, I would rather lie down here in the bracken and die this very night. There is nothing I would not do to lift myself above this life, and find a place in one where I might not only see again, but meet—and, oh! blessed thought—speak with—Ah! what have I said?"

"The truth, I fear, in spite of thyself!" responded Jock, bitterly, as he looked into her face, now grown scarlet with confused blushes. "It was the heart, and not the head, which prompted those words, Zillah, and I know now why thou art eager to disown thy people—to deny the miracle, and say thou wast not a gypsy. So, then, Old Zorah spoke the truth when she said that thou wert in love with a man not of our race, and who had never looked upon thy face, nor heard the music of thy voice."

"It is three years since that accursed day in Wales, when you looked, unseen thyself, upon Lord Alaric Keith's face, and begged so earnestly to have him enticed into our camp upon some lying pretext; and what Zorah said then, thou hast at last proved to be true; Zillah, thou lovest that man; and for his accursed sake thou wouldst forswear thy race, and be no more a gypsy."

"What if I do?" she answered, drawing herself up and throwing back her head with a movement not unlike the trick of a defiant stag. "I am mistress of my own heart, and I may love where I will."

"Ay, and thou mayst hang thyself before that love is requited, retorted Jack, angrily. "Among thy people thou art a sacred hostage, but to *him* thou art the lowest and the meanest, and he would choose death a hundred times sooner than mate with a gypsy. Go to him, if thou dost hold my words lightly—he is at Glandore Court to—

night—go to him, tell him what thou art, and see how little higher than a worm the man thou lovest will hold thee. Men of his stamp choose no wives from the daughters of Ishmael; but if thou wouldst rather be his light o' love than my bride——”

Her hands flashed upward suddenly, and smote him upon the lips.

“You coward!” she exclaimed indignantly. “You spoke the truth when you said I was far above you. *I am* so far above you that I am forever unattainable. I had rather be a pig, and herd with swine, than mate with such as you. Now go! and understand that, if I could not love you before, I *would* not, now that I have ceased to respect you!”

Muttering and growling with sullen fury, Jock scowled at her, and slouching away from her side, left her standing in the bracken, pale, silent, alone.

For a moment after he had made his way into the shadow of the trees and disappeared, Zillah stood there, her eyes full of tears, and her white lips quivering as she looked up at the moonlighted sky, then, with a sudden cry of pain, she threw herself down in the bracken and covered her face with her small white hands.

“It is true—it is true after all!” she cried out, brokenly. “Men of his stamp despise gypsies, and if he knew me he would shrink from me in scorn and contempt. I am a vagabond—a Romany—a houseless, hopeless wretch, who must herd with her kind or go to perdition if she give her love to one of his. And yet I love him—God pity me, I have loved him from the moment I first saw his face, as I shall love him, and him only, to the day of my death. Oh, if I could but enter into the world where he is—if I could cease to be a gypsy—Heaven alone knows what sweet possibilities might yet lie in my future. Oh, Alaric! Alaric! if I thought I might be near you, to win your smiles and gain your love, I would endure torture—chains—the rack itself, to win that blessed privilege. But I may not dream of it. To steal near to you sometimes, and under cover of the darkness look on your dear face, is all the happiness I may hope to realize in this life. Your world is not for me, my beloved; your smiles and kisses are not for Zillah, the gypsy—they are for some more blessed woman, whom I shall hate with the bitterness of death from the moment I hear that your troth is plighted. God help me! God pity me! I am only a gypsy—a daughter of Ishmael—an outcast and a wanderer, despised by all men, save the rabble I must herd with to the end of my miserable days!”

CHAPTER XV.

"AS IN A LOOKING-GLASS."

It is half-past nine by all the clocks and watches in Glandore Court, and the pleasant evening has reached its pleasantest point.

In the alcove of the drawing-room the old earl and Lord George Ruthven are deep in the discussion of politics, with the Countess of Elsdale lingering near (and just interested enough in the conversation to give others who are *not* an opportunity for "those soft passages which run between the bars and make the music doubly sweet"); on a *tete-a-tete*, far removed from all the rest, Lady Blanche Hay is carrying on a desperate flirtation with Sir Charles Enderby; on a *fauteuil* at the other end of the room, Lady Grace Merton and Viscount Warleigh are indulging in the same pleasant occupation, only in a milder and more decorous phase; at the piano, Miss Muriel Ruthven is softly playing some tender, murmuring melody, and in a subdued tone, chatting meanwhile with Sir Harry Charteris, who bends over her with his hands on the music, which he has *not* turned for the past ten minutes, although he is there for that especial purpose, and in the curtained recess of the window-seat, Miss Catheron and Lord Keith

"Sport not with love, but gladly wrap
His rosey fetters round their loyal hearts!"

But even in the midst of her desperate flirtation, Lady Blanche Hay finds time to steal an occasional glance at the face of her successful rival, and the sight of its utter happiness stings her even while she listens, laughingly, to the tender nothings of her handsome *vis-a-vis*.

"Love not! love not! oh, warning vainly said"

tinkles the murmuring music under Miss Ruthven's listless fingers, and recognizing its soft, seductive measures, Lord Keith looks up and softly laughs.

"Miss Ruthven is a false prophetess, I fear," he said lightly. "She doesn't live up to the lesson she propounds. That is the fifth time she has repeated that measure, and neither she nor Charteris seem to realize that it is about time to turn the page. What a charming night it is, Miss Catheron. The moonlight is like liquid pearl, and the air as soft and sweet as balm. It is close in here; may we not go for a turn up and down the terrace? We seem to be an especial necessity to no one here. May we not go and enjoy the beauties of the night by ourselves?"

For all answer she arose quietly and stole out of the room with him, catching up a soft silken wrap as they

passed through the hallway, and winding it about her head and shoulders; then slipping her hand through his proffered arm, she walked out with him into the clear light of the moon.

At the end of the terrace where a flowering guelder rose wreathed the white pillars, and stretching forth its leafy screen, shadowed the terrace with a canopy of foliage and flowers, Lord Keith paused, and drawing from his arm the slim, white hand that rested so lightly there, took it in his own, and turning, looked into her drooping face.

"Miss Catheron—Inez!" he said, very tenderly. "You told me to-night that I could not offend you if I told you all my thoughts—you told me you would listen if I wished to speak, and, oh, if I am mad enough to falsely think that you know already what those thoughts are, and knowing, will yet listen, be merciful and check my madness now, before I wound you with my words!"

Miss Catheron lifted her clear, blue eyes, and a smile of happiness lighted her flushing face.

"You are not mad, and I tell you again that you give me no offense, Lord Keith," she frankly said; "why then should I check you?"

"It is true, then?"—rapturously. "You know what I would say? You have already guessed it, Inez, and yet you bid me speak? Oh, my love, my life, my own! surely this must be a dream!"

"If it be, then let us dream it out, for I shall not wish to be awakened!" she naively answered, and almost before the words were finished she found her head drawn down upon his shoulder, his arms wrapped about her, and his kisses falling sweet and fast on eyes and lips and hair.

"You love me then, Inez?" he cried out, with a laugh of utter happiness. "Sweet, I didn't dream it, then? You love me and will be my wife? Say it, Inez—say it, dear! I cannot believe it until I hear it from your own sweet lips."

"I love you, Alaric, and I will be your wife!" she softly answered, and there again his kisses stopped her mouth, and for a long, sweet time they talked, in murmured voices, all that foolishly happy talk which is of interest to lovers alone in the first dawning of their life's great joy.

For many minutes they stood there, deaf and blind to all the world but their own selves; but presently the sound of general laughter floating out from the open windows of the drawing-room acquainted them with the fact that the "party element" had been abolished, and the conversation was now general, and, with a smile and a start, Miss Catheron turned toward the door.

"We must go in now, or I shall be missed, Alaric," she said. "Even in one's happiness one must not forget the duty owing to one's guests!"

"If I go in, I shall blazon my happiness to every soul in the room," he answered, with a laugh, "and I wish to keep it to myself until I have spoken with the earl. I cannot realize yet that Heaven has been so very kind to me, Inez. Let me stroll through the grounds and smoke awhile before I show myself in there."

For all answer she waved her white hand and fluttered out of sight, leaving him standing there with only her soft white wrap, lying just where it fell when he took her in his arms, to prove to him that all his happiness was not the substance of a dream.

He stooped and took it up, pressed it to his lips; and then, as though it were too sacred to be roughly handled, gently laid it across the terrace rail.

"Some lives are trebly blest, and mine is one!" he murmured, with a thrill of happiness. "She loves me—Inez loves me—all is said in that!"

Then, pausing a moment to select a cigar from his case and light it, he walked slowly down the steps, struck into the footpath, and strolled off into the darkness, leaving a trail of smoke behind him.

For one moment silence reigned over the spot where that brief, sweet love-scene had been enacted; then, with scarcely a sound to disturb the stillness of the night, the matted rose-boughs parted, and a slim figure glided forward, and the moonlight, slanting down, touched the awed face of Zillah, the gypsy.

"Was it real, or have the people of my race conjured up a vision to torture and surprise me?" she cried out, in a faint, wavering voice. "There is no mirror here, and yet I have looked upon my own reflection—looked and seen it gathered into *his* arms, pressed with his kisses, blessed with the acknowledgment of his love, while I, the reality, crouched in the darkness, hoping only to look unseen upon his dear face.

"What does it mean? Who has wrought this mystery? Who has conjured up this vision to——"

She stopped abruptly, and the words ended with a sharp and sudden gasp.

Her eyes had fallen upon the white wrap lying over the terrace rail.

She put forth her hand suddenly, touched it, felt that it was real, and then, with a faint, desolate cry, snatched it down and trampled it beneath her feet.

"It was not a vision—it was real—real!" she cried out, in a shuddering voice. "The woman he loves—the woman

who lay upon his bosom, who looked at him with my eyes, and spoke to him with my voice, was not an image but a reality! His love is not for me; but some one who is my exact counterpart, has won what I may never hope to own, and I hate her! hate her! hate her!"

The sound of Lady Blanche's bubbling laughter, rippling over the stillness, and drawing nearer to the open door of the house, broke in upon the gypsy's passionate outburst, and, realizing that some one was coming out upon the terrace—knowing that the presence of a gypsy, in the grounds of Glandore Court, would be the signal for her arrest as a vagrant and a thief—Zillah snatched up the white wrap, threw it over her head and shoulders, and, conscious of nothing save a desire to escape, plunged into the shadow of the trees, darted fleetly in the direction of the gates, and so ran headlong into the arms of Alaric Keith.

"My darling, you have managed to get away from your guests and have come to make me happy again?" he said, with a happy laugh, as, startled by this unexpected encounter, Zillah fell back, with a faint, low cry, and some glancing moonbeams, sifting through the trees, touched her beautiful upraised face.

"Sweet, it was kind of you to do it, for I think I am losing my senses with joy! Oh, love! oh, life! what have I done, I wonder, that I should be blessed like this?"

Then his strong arms, winding themselves about her, drew her closer to his heart, his kisses fell like rain upon her flushing face, and, holding her thus, he smiled down into her upraised eyes, and softly touched his lips to hers in one long, lingering kiss.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE OAK WALK.

It is difficult to describe the state of Zillah's feelings as she thus found herself clasped in the arms of the man whom she had so long and hopelessly loved, and—knowing the while that his caresses were meant for another—felt his heart beat against her own, his kisses fall warm and fast upon her upturned face, and heard, as in a dream, his passionate words of endearment.

Her first impulse was truly a womanly one—to break away from his lordship and flee in the darkness, but his clinging arms held her tightly, his kisses—rained down upon her face with all the passionate rapture of a passionately rapturous love—seemed to render her powerless, seemed to tear away from her all sense of the duty she owed to him and to herself; she only realized that she

loved him; that she was lying upon his bosom, feeling his caresses, and hearing, in reality, what she had so often heard in her dreams—his words of reverent love addressed to *her*—and in the weakness of her heart and the strength of her passion, she held her peace and took the goods the gods provided, caring not *how* they came so that they were hers at last.

"Sweet, how you tremble!" exclaimed, tenderly, Lord Keith, as, with a shudder, she closed her eyes and abandoned herself to fate. "Your face, too, is very pale. I fear you have been unduly excited, or"—this with sudden apprehension—"perhaps I have startled you by my vehemence. The *role* of Romeo is so new to me, dear, that, granted your love, I am like a child possessed of a new toy—so rudely happy that I injure what I most prize! Have I shocked you, dear, by my boisterous conduct?"

"No!" she answered, faintly, her eyes opening and looking up into his, only to close again, as her whole face became bright and warm with rosy blushes. "No, it is not that, it is only that I am happy and—your love seems a dream too beautiful to be true!"

"But it *is* true, Inez—you know that it is, do you not, dear? Open your eyes and look at me. You make me think of those quaintly-sweet words of Victor Hugo's, as I see you now: 'A face like that without eyes, is like a palace without windows.' Look at me, sweet, and tell me again that you love me. I can scarcely credit even now, that I am so truly blest."

Her eyes opened again as he spoke; the rosy color came and went in fitful waves across her radiant face; she suffered him to lift her arms and fold them about his neck, then in a voice of utter happiness:

"I love you, Alaric!" she softly said. "I have always loved you, but without hope of such a joy as this."

He laughed a soft, low laugh, and gently patted her flushing cheek.

"Could the rich Miss Catheron be without hope of winning the love of *any* man whom she chose to honor with her favor?" he said, jokingly. "If report speaks truly, you could have worn the coronet of a royal duchess, my darling; while I have nothing to offer you but a mortgaged estate, an honest name and a heart that was all your own from the first moment I looked into your dear eyes. You are my world, dear, and I would have fought to win you if you were as poor as a beggar and I as rich as a king! You believe that, do you not, Inez?"

"I believe that—yes, Alaric," answered Zillah, nervously. "But let us go further away from the house, dear; I—I am afraid that some one may intrude upon us here,

and I would rather keep our secret to ourselves for a time. I cannot remain with you long, Alaric; they will miss me, you know!"

"How clever of you to escape them, and how kind to come to me!" he tenderly said, as he wound his arm about her waist and led her gently down the quiet, tree-shaded avenue. "If we are to keep our engagement very long a secret from our friends, you must grant me many of these stolen interviews, sweet, or I shall grow as reckless as a hungry bear, and betray everything by pouncing upon you and embracing you before all the guests. See that pretty statue of Diana gleaming through the trees. We will make that our trysting-place in future, love. You can steal away and meet me here sometimes, can you not, dear?"

"I will try," she answered. "When you wish to speak with me alone, steal out of the house without saying a word. If I miss you from the room I shall know where you have gone, and, as often as it is possible, come to meet you here. You must be content with that, Alaric, and do not be angry if I sometimes fail to keep the tryst."

"Angry?" he repeated with a smile. "My darling, you have given me so much already that I must always be grateful—always be satisfied with the knowledge that you love me, come what may!"

She made him no reply. With her face aglow with color, and her eyes agleam with happiness, she strayed on through the darkness and stillness of the Oak Walk—listening to his tender words, and "giving vow for vow;" until the pealing of the stable clock chiming the half-hour after ten, awakened her from the trance into which she had fallen, and brought her to the realization of the time.

"Oh, I must go back now!" she exclaimed, in a startled voice. "I did not dream it was so late, Alaric; and they will be asking awkward questions at the house if I remain away longer. Don't come back with me, or our friends will suspect the truth, and indeed I do not wish it known to everybody yet."

"And, least of all, to Lady Blanche Hay, I fancy," he supplemented. "I imagine, from your manner this evening, that you are not particularly fond of her ladyship. Am I right in that suspicion, Inez?"

"Yes," responded Zillah, taking her cue from his words. "I wish to guard our secret from Lady Blanche Hay, Alaric. I do not like her, dear. I fancy she is deceitful, and I should not care to have her see us return in company. Remain here until I have had time to reach the house and rejoin our friends."

"As the queen wills," he softly said, as he took her in

his arms and kissed her passionately. "Good-night, my darling, I shall meet you again before retiring, of course, but our 'lovers' good-night' is now. Kiss me, and tell me once again that you love me, Inez, that I may dream of it until morning."

She flung her arms about him with a passionate vehemence, and a strange, intense cry that thrilled the very fibers of his being.

"I love you—I love you—I love you!" she exclaimed, her eyes filling, and her voice husky with muffled sobs. "Oh, Alaric, my darling, it will kill me if I ever have to give you up after this, and if another comes between us—"

"No other can, sweet—no other shall! Why, my darling, your eyes are full of tears. Do you then love me so much?"

"I love you better than my life—better than the salvation of my soul!" she answered, with utter *abandon*. "I love you so well that, come what may, I can never give you up after this night's happiness, Alaric. Think of me—dream of me—*love me*, my darling, for death were sweeter than to lose you now!"

So speaking, she broke out of his arms with a strange, hysterical cry, fluttered into the darkness, and was gone before he realized it.

For several minutes Lord Keith remained standing just where she had left him, his eyes looking into the darkness as though he struggled to catch yet another glimpse of her now vanished figure, his whole face radiant with happiness, then:

"She loves me—my darling loves me, and I am the most blessed of men," he said, with a thrill of exquisite tenderness. "Oh, my queen, if you only knew how little you have to dread a rival; if I could only tell you how happy you have made me to-night, you would realize in very truth that perfect love which casteth out all fear. Sweet, if a life's devotion can prove to you how dear you are to me, the future will be without a cloud!"

As he ceased speaking he selected a fresh cigar from his case, struck a match, and proceeded to light it.

But as the brief aromatic flame for a second—ere it changed to a gleaming ember—irradiated the darkness about him, his eyes fell upon something that lay glittering beneath the trees, and stooping, he picked it up.

It was the small, silver star which Zillah had worn upon her forehead at her "devotions" to-night, and which, somehow, had broken its fastening and fallen to the earth during that impassioned parting with his lordship.

"What a quaint jewel!" muttered Lord Keith, turning

it over in his palm, and scrutinizing it by the light of the glowing vesuvian. "There is an inscription upon it, too, but I cannot make it out, for it is in a language of which I am ignorant. It is neither Greek nor Latin, nor yet French, German, Italian, or even Sanskrit. As near as I can make it out, it reads '*sulla opollis glut*'" (spirit-born, or, literally, born of the blood of angels), "and, by the final word, one might be tempted to believe it something of the Romany jargon, that mixture made up of the slang of a dozen languages, for '*glut*' is surely Bohemian, and means 'blood.' But what in the name of common sense is the meaning of '*sulla opollis*,' and to what tongue or tongues do those two words belong? The jewel is of solid silver, but is of little value, yet Inez must have dropped it, for I found it lying upon one of my own footprints, which clearly proves that it fell after we two strolled here together, and, as it isn't mine, it certainly must be hers. Perhaps she values it as a keepsake—a relic or a talisman presented to her by some of her friends, and I will restore it to her at once!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"OH, SERPENT HEART, HID WITH A FLOW'RING FACE!"

HAVING arrived at this conclusion, Lord Keith did what was only natural—slipped the little silver star into his pocket, struck a fresh match, lighted his cigar, and strolled leisurely back in the direction of the house—indulging, meanwhile, in more sweet imaginings than I could write or you would care to read.

The balm and sweetness of the Kentish night floated about him and filled his senses with the odor of flowers and the tinkle of falling waters. He dawdled along leisurely until he reached the terminus of the Oak Walk and the Court itself stood before him.

The murmuring sound of gay voices floating out through the open windows of the drawing-room apprised him of the fact that some merry subject was in progress of discussion, and flinging away his cigar, he crossed the paved courtyard, ran up the steps of the mansion, and had just turned toward the doorway with the intention of rejoining the party in the drawing room, when he caught sight of something white lying in a ball upon the pavement of the terrace.

He walked toward it, saw that it was Miss Catheron's white shawl, and stooping, picked it up.

"She must have encountered some one as she regained the terrace, and flung this here to avoid the suspicion that she had been wandering through the grounds!" he mused.

"Precious little trickster! I'll not betray her, bless her heart"—as he kissed the white shawl which had known the blessing of his darling's touch—"I'll toss it in the cloakroom as I pass, and then——"

The soft *frou-frou* of a woman's robe, as it brushed the stone pavement of the terrace, broke in upon his murmured words; a breath of perfume floated to him, faint, delicate, sweet with the breath of woodland violets; and turning, as a radiant vision glided out of the darkness and stood before him, he found himself looking into the brilliant hazel eyes of Lady Blanche Hay.

He started and drew himself up with a frigid sort of hauteur, and made her a dignified bow.

"Is your ladyship also bent upon viewing the beauties of Glandore Court by moonlight?" he said, frostily, feeling that the occasion demanded that he should say something, and, for want of a better subject, falling back upon that threadbare one, the weather. "It is a charming night, and will amply repay your interest."

"I am not interested in it at all," ventured Lady Blanche, her voice trembling faintly, and her white, ringed hands moving nervously up and down the pearl sticks of her closed fan.

"It is neither the moonlight nor the beauties of Glandore Court which has tempted me forth to-night, Lord Keith. I had but one purpose when I escaped from the drawing-room a moment since, and that purpose was to see—to speak with you."

His lordship made a stiff bow, the very essence of polite repulsion.

"Lady Hay does me too much honor," he said frostily. "I fear that I am neither a worthy object for so much consideration, nor yet an appreciative one."

He made a movement as though to step by her, but my lady put forth one small, gemmed hand, and lifted an appealing look to his pale, contemptuous face.

"At the least, my lord, you are a gentleman!" she said, with some faint shadow of reproach in her glib, sweet-sounding voice, "and, as a gentleman, you will accord me the right due a woman when she seeks to vindicate herself, by correcting the errors of her past. Oh, Lord Keith, I only ask your forbearance for a moment, and if I am forced to recall to your memory that miserable night at Carn Ruth——"

"Is it necessary?" he broke in, coldly. "It seems to me that an unpleasant past were better left buried instead of dragging it out of its grave where it was fast being forgotten. It is like raking over the ashes of a burnt-out fire—even if you find a true ember, it will scarcely repay the

raising of so much dust, since it must die anew the moment it is exposed!"

"I do not wish to find an ember, and I would not rekindle the fire even if I could!" responded her ladyship, with a look suggestive of saints and seraphs and wilted lilies. "Oh, Lord Keith! will you not give me credit for one act of womanliness—one spark of shame?"

"Need we discuss the subject?" he answered, coldly. "It cannot be productive of any pleasure to your ladyship, and I assure you, it is thoroughly distasteful to me. As I have already remarked, the past is better if buried, Lady Blanche—especially such a past as ours!"

Her ladyship fell back a step, and covered her pretty, traitorous face with her small, gemmed hands.

"Hate me—despise me—cover me with humiliation. I deserve it!" she cried out, in a dull, palpitating voice. "I held you nobler than the rest of the world, but you have imbibed the popular creed, and believe the follies of the girl must be held forever as condemnation against the possible integrity of the woman. Were our places reversed, I would have done what you did that night in Carn Ruth, Lord Keith—for surely no honorable man could have acted otherwise—but I would not have spurned your penitence had you come as I come now to confess and ask absolution for the one thoughtless act of a lonely, foolish child!"

"Pardon me!" exclaimed his lordship, flushing remorsefully, and putting forth his hand. "I, too, have erred, it seems, and have need to ask for forgiveness. Had I guessed your reason for reviving that painful subject at this late day, Lady Blanche, I would have told you at the first what I tell you now: That one foolish act is forgiven and forgotten!"

"Oh, is it possible that you fancied I had come to repeat the shameful act!" exclaimed her ladyship, taking her cue from his words. "Oh, Lord Keith, how you must have despised me!"

"Not more than I honor you now," he answered, "for the woman who has courage to humble herself by calling up such an experience for the simple sake of showing her penitence and acknowledging a fault is indeed a brave one, and worthy of the highest respect. Whatever errors you have committed, Lady Blanche, are amply atoned for by this sacrifice of your woman's pride, and from the depths of my soul I honor and admire you. Long ago I forgave that thoughtless act. Will you not take my hand to-night as a pledge that from this moment I will cease to remember it?"

She fluttered forward with a rare and radiant smile and dropped her cool, soft *paw* into his outstretched palm.

"The past is forgiven, then?" she sweetly asked.

"More than forgiven—forgotten!" he gravely answered; and, suppressing a desire to laugh in his face, my lady smiled instead, knowing that her scheme had succeeded and she might write him down her dupe.

He lingered half a minute longer to exchange a few pleasant words with her, then proffering her his arm, led her back to the drawing-room.

The pleasant party was on the point of breaking up for the night, and an exclamation of satisfaction greeted his lordship as he made his appearance, although Inez—who was standing beside the piano chatting with Miss Ruthven—involuntarily arched her eyebrows as she saw that Lady Blanche was hanging on his arm.

Resigning his charge, Lord Keith found his way to Inez, and smiling into her face, said:

"The evening has gone like magic."

"Which attest the excellent quality of your cigar!" she answered, with a half smile.

"Or the fascinations of Lady Blanche!" put in Miss Ruthven, gayly, whereat everybody but Miss Catheron laughed, and in the midst of the merriment, the butler made his appearance, and announced that "the sherry and cigars were awaiting the gentlemen's attention in the smoking-room," and the old countess, taking the cue, gave the signal for the feminine element to beat a retreat, by rising and walking toward the door.

The ladies, with laughing good-nights, fluttered out of the room, took their tapers from the niche in the corridor, and, one after the other, pattered up the stairs to bed and left the gentlemen to straggle into the library, one by one, for their "hour o' wassail afore the couch."

Lord Keith lingered until all but he and Miss Catheron had passed from sight.

"A thousand happy dreams, my darling!" he said, as he bent over and stole a kiss from her lips. "Sweet, you have been very kind to me to-night—so kind that I can scarcely realize my happiness even yet. You will remember all the promises you have made me, will you not, my darling?"

"Did I make you many?" she answered, with a smile and a blush. "I must have lived those happy moments in a dream, Alaric, for I can remember nothing save the promise to be your wife."

"So that you remember that, all the others are yours to break at pleasure!" he answered, ardently; then, as his thoughts returned to the silver star: "I found this

lying upon the ground after you left me," he added, with a smile, as he took it from his pocket and laid it on her palm. "It must have fallen from the sky when you told me that you loved me, my darling. I cannot read the inscription upon it, for it is in a language that I never learned, but, although it is not a costly jewel, I fancy that you value it, Inez."

"I do—as a memento of this night, Alaric," she answered, smilingly, thinking that he gave it to her as a talisman. "When I look at it in future I shall remember where and when you found it, and the vow it represents!"

Then, with a tender good-night, she passed by him and went up the staircase, and blowing her a parting kiss, his lordship walked away in the direction of the library.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"IN THE DEAD WASTE AND MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT."

FROM the top of the staircase—crouched back in a dark doorway, with her taper extinguished, and her small, sparkling hands so tightly shut that the nails bruised the soft flesh of her little pink palms—Lady Blanche Hay had been a silent and a secret witness to that tender good-night, and she could almost have shrieked aloud in her bitter envy and malice as she saw his lordship's kiss fall lightly upon Miss Catheron's lips.

"It has come at last—come at last!" she dully muttered, setting her small teeth together, and speaking through them with a trick like the snarling of a vicious dog. "He did ask her to be his wife while they were out there upon the terrace alone, and she has accepted him. What was the trinket he gave her as a keepsake and a memento of this night? It looked like a silver star, and it bore, he said, some inscription which he could not make out. I hope it is the record of my curse, and that he will one day understand it. I hate him—hate them both—with a bitterness and a depth of malice that will know no end until I have spoiled their lives, and wring their hearts as he wrung mine on the night he spurned my fortune and flung my love back in my face with loathing and disgust. Hark! they are parting now, and I must get away to my room before my presence here is discovered."

She saw that Miss Catheron was about to ascend the staircase, and, knowing that there was nothing more to be gained by playing the spy, slipped silently out of her dark retreat, and, like the pretty, treacherous little cat that she was, went with swift, soundless footfalls, down the corridor, and glided into her own room.

"Oh, it is you at last, miladi!" exclaimed her maid, starting out of a nap as her ladyship glided in. "*Ma foi!* how very pale you are! and no wonder, since the taper is extinguished, and miladi was obliged to come through the dark passage alone and without light."

"Stop your silly chatter, Delphine!" exclaimed her ladyship, petulantly. "The taper was not extinguished until I myself blew out the light when I reached the door of this room, so you may spare yourself the trouble of retailing to Miss Catheron's maid how your mistress came through the halls without a light, and made her appearance before you looking pale and startled!"

"Ah, miladi, I never mention your affairs to any one, I assure you!"

"Don't you, indeed? Then you have either mistaken your vocation, or you are the first of your class that didn't go talking her mistress' affairs to every Tom, Dick, and Harry of her acquaintance. If I am pale—which I doubt—it is due to a wretched headache, and no more, for there is nothing in the darkness that has power to alarm me—you may rest assured. But there, don't worry me with your protestations—your chatter annoys me, and I tell you my head aches!"

"Shall I bathe it for you, miladi, when I take down your hair and arrange it for the night?" ventured Delphine.

"No!" responded her ladyship ungraciously. "Simply lay out my *robe de nuit* and go about your business. I sha'n't need your assistance to-night. Take the lavender water with you, so that you will not have to disturb me by coming in here when you prepare my bath in the morning."

"Anything else, miladi?"

"Nothing except my chocolate at eight o'clock sharp. Now go!"

Delphine took up the cut glass flagon of lavender water, and having already placed her ladyship's night-robe in the chair beside her couch, bowed herself out of the room, and left her mistress to the bad company of her own spiteful thoughts.

Bolting the door as the maid took her departure, Lady Blanche walked to the window, flicked back the curtains, and looked up at the calm, moonlighted sky.

"I wonder how far it is to Bracken Hollow, and if I dare venture to make the journey to-night?" she muttered. "He said—my father—to come to-morrow and I forgot at the time how nearly impossible it will be to do so. The day's festivities are all arranged, and, even if I could plead sickness as an excuse for not participating in them,

I could not dream of leaving the house without being seen by some one. Besides, it is too dangerous for a woman in my position to risk visiting the gypsies by daylight, and to-morrow night we are to select and cast the play for our private theatricals. No! there is no other course left open to me. Either I must go to-night, or by failing to keep my appointment to-morrow, risk my father's displeasure and perhaps lose the chance to learn something that may be of benefit to me in my warfare against Lord Keith and the woman he loves.

"No, I mustn't let such a chance slip through my fingers. In twenty minutes there will not be a soul astir in the entire house. I can easily slip out and make my way to the gypsy encampment, and—good news or bad—know all before morning!"

Her voice died down and silence fell.

For a moment or two she stood before the window noiselessly beating the carpet with her slippered foot, and staring moodily at the brilliant sky, then, with a sudden movement:

"I will do it!" she said resolutely, as she dropped the curtain and walked from the window. "Such a possibility is worth *some* trouble, and I will go to-night!"

Having arrived at this conclusion, she proceeded at once to remove her sumptuous evening toilet, then to select from her wardrobe a walking costume of rich, dark-green cloth—the plainest and least conspicuous of her many dresses—and hurriedly make the change necessary for the fulfillment of her purpose.

Her dainty satin slippers were replaced by stout walking-boots, over which she drew a pair of rubber sandals in order that her escape from the house might be made without the faintest sound betraying her footfalls as she passed along the corridor and descended the oaken staircase; then she donned the darkest and least noticeable article of head-gear she possessed, tied over it, and over her face as well, a thick, dark veil which effectually concealed her features, and, having at length completed all arrangements, put out the light and made her way into the hall.

The rubber sandals filled their mission to perfection, for not a sound disturbed the utter stillness of the house as she slipped down the staircase—a shadow among other shadows—and, guided by the one spark of light shed by the night-lamp in the lower corridor, made her way to the massive oaken doors, unlocked them, and slipped out into the balm and starshine of the summer night.

With fleet yet echoless steps—as though she had become in reality the sleek and treacherous *cat* she was at heart,

she crossed the paved courtyard—slipped into the shadow and stillness of the Oak Walk, and made her way unseen past the gatekeeper's lodge, through the wicket, and so into the high-road beyond.

She knew where Bracken Hollow lay, even though ignorant of the exact distance; and, striking out in that direction, walked on with hurried steps.

It was a long and dismal journey, but she never slackened her pace, and never experienced one faint qualm of terror from first to last.

The light of the camp-fire guided her to the stamping ground of the gypsies as she threaded her way through the woods and descended into Bracken Hollow; and, although the barking of curs and the swift gliding of unseen bodies through the rustling thickets warned her as she advanced that her presence was known, and she was being surrounded and shut in by an ever-narrowing circle of lawless marauders, who would hold her life less valuable than the jewels she had neglected to remove from her fingers, her babbling fragments of song never ceased to flow, and no tremor disturbed the smoothness of her voice.

She walked on fearlessly—even though some cautious hand had suddenly veiled the flickering light of the camp-fire—plunged through the coppice, plowed her way through the knee-deep bracken, and then, halting suddenly, put her curved hands to her mouth and boldly halloed.

"Hello there! are you all asleep?" she cried out at the top of her voice, dropping easily and gracefully—as if it were nature asserting herself—out of miladi into the gypsy.

"Romanies, are you deaf or blind? Hallo-o-o, I say—I want you!"

There was a swift rush through thicket and bracken upon all sides of her, and in one moment she was surrounded by a dozen stalwart gypsies, all cudgel in hand.

"Th'art a brave 'un, lass!" exclaimed one burly fellow, as he sprung toward her. "Up wi' th' veil an' Ah'l luk if th'art a *fair* 'un, too?"

He thrust forth his grimy paw as though to tear the veil from her face as he spoke, but with a sudden movement of her small, white hand she dashed it aside and drew herself up indignantly.

"Who touches me will have to answer for his boldness!" she cried out dauntlessly. "I am here unarmed, but not unprotected. I seek Marco, the king. Go to him—tell him his daughter is here and wishes to speak with him!"

"Hoot! but th'art a good un at a jest an' a plucky!"

exclaimed the fellow, with a boisterous laugh. "Marco has na darter, m'lass, and th'art na kin o' hisn."

"I am the granddaughter of Hulda the Weasel, and the child of Marco, the king!" she returned, bravely. "Who wishes to prove the truth of it, and to feel the weight of Marco's wrath, has only to offer an indignity to *me*. Go to the king—tell him that Maggie Talford is here, and then——"

The sentence ended with a throttled scream.

At the first mention of the name, "Hulda the Weasel," several of the men had darted away in the direction of the king's tent; but it was not this, nor yet any offer of violence from the few remaining ones which had called forth that startled scream from my lady's lips.

While yet she was speaking, a tall, white figure had glided, ghost-like, through the bracken, and vanished among the tents and trees; but in that brief moment, when it turned to look at her, as it glimmered by, the moonlight drenching it in a glare of steel-white splendor, my lady had seen something which chilled her very blood.

"Inez Catheron—Inez Catheron!" she cried out, in a hoarse voice of terror. "Merciful Heaven! what brings her to Bracken Hollow, among my father's people?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"FORTUNE BRINGS IN SOME BOATS THAT ARE NOT STEERED."

THE burly fellow who had first accosted her, and who reveled in the characteristic name of Ishmael Montargis, caught her ladyship's cry of horrified surprise as that white figure glided across the "open," and soundlessly vanished among the tents of the gypsy encampment, and turning sharply, he glanced into her pale, startled face.

"Hoot, lass! what be't matter wi' 'ee noo?" he ejaculated, in a surprised voice; for neither he nor his colleagues had seen the gliding figure which had so terribly startled Lady Blanche. "Ah'm thinkin' thoort offen thar noodle, t' way thoo screamt, ma missis—ay, an' nobbut a daftie wud speer at t' darkness lark thoort a-doin' on wi' 'em ool's eyes o' tharn!"

"That woman!" she gasped, scarcely noticing Ishmael's words, and at the same time nervously drawing down her veil. "How came she here? Which of you does she visit, and at this hour of the night? I thought she was averse to all people of the Romany race; I heard her say as much only this very day; and now—my Heaven! now I find her here!"

"Find who here?" growled Ishmael, glancing in the direction of her ladyship's gaze, and, of course, discovering

nothing. "Theer be nobbut oursels in t' Hollow, daftie! An' noo lass but thee ha' coom to-neet!"

"But I saw her, I tell you!" persisted Lady Blanche, nervously. "I saw Miss Catheron, as clearly as I now see you—Miss Catheron, of Glandore Court; and I wish to know—I must know—her purpose for coming here to-night!"

Ishmael jerked out a short, deriding laugh, in which his colleagues joined.

"Hoot, lass! thoort a daftie for sure," he responded, with a shrug of his massive shoulders. "Hearken to her, ma laddies! Miss Catheron, o' Glandore Coort, a-comin' to Bracken Hollow—an' i' the dead o' the neet—to spoken wi' t' Romanies. Moor laik she be t' one to send us to th' lock-up at Leith, Ah'm thinkin', eh, Jock, ma cully?"

"Ay, much more likely, Ishmael," responded Jock. "If she is like her grandfather, the earl—ill luck feed him!—there'd be a gibbet for every Romany in England. *His* hatred for the whole gypsy race is as well known as his name throughout the United Kingdom, and it's fair to suppose that his granddaughter shares it—it's in the blood, at all events."

"But I tell you I saw her here not a moment since!" still persisted Lady Blanche. "I am no fool, and I know what I say. I have seen Miss Catheron too often to be mistaken, and this I tell you: Whether you were aware of her presence or not, she certainly was here not two minutes ago. Possibly she has stolen into the camp without her presence being discovered!"

"And possibly you are dreaming!" returned Jock, with a smile. "Even supposing it possible that she could pass *us*, she could *not*, pass the outposts without a warning of her coming being sent to the camp, any more than *you* did. If you saw any woman at all, it must have been one belonging to the tribe, and your fancy has played you a trick. You, yourself, are the only stranger who has penetrated Bracken Hollow to-night, my good woman, and even you must give an account of yourself if Marco denies the relationship which you claim exists between you both!"

"He will not deny it, be sure of that!" returned Lady Blanche. "And as I shall wish to be conveyed to the cross-roads below Glandore Court as soon as my interview with Marco is over, you will do well to see that a vehicle is prepared for that purpose. What must necessarily pass between my father and me to-night may occupy much time, and I shall have need of a conveyance in order to return to the cross-roads before the day breaks."

"Ah, then you *came* from that direction, did you?"

"What is that to you?" responded her ladyship, testily.

"Your province is to obey, not to question. Do not overstep the bounds!"

Jock had just opened his lips to make reply to this, but the arrival of Marco gave matters a different turn.

"Jock—Ishmael—Pharos! what is this report which has been brought to me?" he demanded, as he strode forward, plowing his way through the bracken and approaching the spot where Lady Blanche stood. "They told me—Nar-rick and Paulo—that a stranger has entered the camp, and claims to be—Maggie! It is really you, my child?"

This last remark—uttered as it was in a tone of joyous recognition—was due to the fact that her ladyship had suddenly lifted her veil while he was speaking and stepped toward him, with her small, gemmed hand extended.

"Yes, father," she answered, as he took her hand, and, drawing her to his bosom, kissed and embraced her. "It is really Maggie—really your daughter. I do not wonder that you doubted it, for I have risked a great deal in coming here to-night. But I found that it would be impossible for me to come, as you wished, to-morrow; and, sooner than have you feel that I have forgotten my promise, or desired to shirk the task you would have me perform, I have come to you to-night to hear what you have to tell me, and to prove to you that your people, your foes, your wrongs, are mine, and I am ready to stand by them and you."

A faint murmur of satisfaction—voiced by all the gypsies—greeted this crafty little bit of theatrical clap-trap upon my lady's part, and, tenderly patting her soft cheek, Marco lost no time in explaining to his admiring subjects that her ladyship's claim was strictly true; that she really was his daughter—whom he had long believed dead—and that as she was now bent upon avenging the wrongs of his people, as a gypsy should, etc., etc., he wished the strictest secrecy preserved regarding her personality, and whatever visits she might pay to the camp from this time forth.

"Now, my jolly lads, 'fake away,' and carry the news to your pals!" he concluded, after the pledge of fealty had been given her ladyship by the king's admiring auditors; "and you, Ishmael, bid Old Redempta brew a punch for your future queen, and serve it without delay. Come, Maggie, my lass—it's only a step to my tent, and we can talk there better than here in the open. Besides, you can rest there while you listen, for I've a long story to tell you, my child."

Her ladyship made no response beyond a simple inclination of the head indicative of her willingness to obey, and

leading her gently across the open into the heart of the encampment, Marco threaded the way between the clustering tents to the one set apart for his individual use, and brushing aside the coarse, red curtain which hung before the entrance, ushered her into the "royal marquee."

Lady Blanche had not forgotten her experience with the mysterious woman who had looked at her with Inez Catheron's face and eyes—neither had she been satisfied by Jock's explanation—and having seated herself upon the couch of skins toward which her father waved her, she related the mysterious affair to him regarding the probability of Lord Glandore's granddaughter being in Bracken Hollow to-night.

Marco scouted the idea as preposterous.

"She is known to no one here," he said. "I, myself, have never set eyes upon her hated face, and moreover, this is the first visit *this* band has ever paid to Kent.

"Doubtless the woman you saw was one belonging to the band, and as your thoughts to-night have been filled with Inez Catheron, you were deceived into finding a resemblance between the two. If Lord Glandore's granddaughter had come to Bracken Hollow, I should have been apprised of it, never fear, for my purpose in selecting this particular band as the next with which I should make a brief sojourn, was simply to see that girl, and find, if possible, some means of carrying out my long-cherished hatred for Kingdon Catheron's daughter, and avenging upon her the injury I suffered at her father's hands. But here is Redempta with the punch, my lass.

"Let us drink a toast in honor of our reunion before I begin the story of the past. Set the punch-bowl upon yonder stool, 'Dempta, and then leave us. If it pleases you, you may then go to sleep and leave Zillah to continue her search alone. She has not yet found the lost talisman, has she?"

"Naw!" returned Old Redempta, shaking her head forlornly. "It is a bad omen, I fear me, Marco; I do not believe that the talisman has been lost in the bracken—I think it has been taken."

"Taken? By whom?"

"By the spirits, no doubt. They gave her life, and mayhap they have plucked the star from her forehead as a sign that they mean soon to take her back to themselves."

"Who is this mysterious creature whom you call Zillah?" queried Lady Blanche, as Old Redempta set down the punch-bowl and shambled out of the tent, whereupon Marco gave her a full account of the miracle supposed to have been performed in the behalf of Taric and Starlight

Bess, and of the reverence in which the "spirit child" was held by the gypsies.

"It cannot be possible that *you* place any reliance upon such a clap-trap yarn as *that*, father?" exclaimed her ladyship, with a smile of derision. "Such a thing could not happen—it is preposterous, and surely *you* do not believe it?"

"Why not?" he answered. "Such miracles are part of the Romany faith, Maggie, and, besides, the girl is different in every way from the mother who bore her, and from all others in the tribe. Her beauty is almost immortal, and her every instinct different from ours."

"A clear proof that one or the other of her reputed parents practiced an ingenious fraud," responded her ladyship, with a gesture of disdain. "Doubtless the child was a foundling, picked up during their travels in America—I believe you said it *was* in America that this miracle was performed?"

"Yes, in the State of Pennsylvania—in the very town where you were born, my darling, and where all my troubles began. Taric and Bess were searching for news of my mother's whereabouts at the time, and the miracle was performed—according to their story—while they were trudging down a lonely road, and Bess held the dead body of little Zillah in her arms!"

"I wonder at which point she laid it down and found or stole the little one she brought back in its place?" retorted her ladyship, sarcastically. "Such a yarn would do well enough for the 'Legends of the Brocken,' but outside of that fascinating volume of witch-love and hobgoblin revels——"

"We will not discuss it!" interposed Marco, with a shade of annoyance in his voice and eyes. "Toss off your punch, my lass, and let me tell you without delay why you should hate the race of Catheron to the day of your death, and follow all who spring from it with the malice of a sleepless, tireless curse."

My lady drained her glass and sunk back upon the couch, her eyes glittering, and her whole face aflame with eager light; and drawing his stool nearer, so that he could watch her while he talked, Marco took up the story of the tragical past, and told it to the end.

Lady Blanche listened breathlessly, her eyes narrowing until they gleamed like sparks of gold through the slits of their half-closed lids, her white lips tightly compressed, her nostrils dilated, and some fitful dashes of color coming and going over her twitching face; and when at length her father reached that part of the story which told how his gypsy mother had lost her life in attempting to avenge

the wrongs of her son, but, nevertheless, had almost totally destroyed the whole race of Catheron before she died, her ladyship leaped to her feet, no longer able to restrain her feelings, and capered about like a mad creature.

"Good, *good*, GOOD!" she cried out, boisterously, her voice rising with each successive iteration of the word, until it sounded, at the last, like the scream of an eagle swooping down upon its prey. "I am proud of you, grandam! You were a heroine, and should have lived—lived! A whole family struck down for the wrongs done your son! Oh, it was a vengeance *worthy* of a gypsy, and it should be recorded upon a tablet of brass. So you were a twin daughter, were you, my beautiful, ice-cold Inez Catheron? There was another born at the same time—another who might have lived to be just such an imperial 'marble goddess' as you have grown, had not my gypsy grandmother brought the brat to a worthy end. Oh, if it had only been *you*, my saintly Inez—my pearl of spotless purity—my hating and hated rival! You escaped the hands of my father's mother, but my father's daughter still remains to carry on the work, and crush you—crush you—crush you!"

Marco arose with a low, exultant cry.

"You *mean* to do it, then, Maggie?" he exclaimed, delightedly—"you mean to see the debt of vengeance paid in full and the last of the Catherons made as wretched as her father made me?"

"I mean to do that—yes, father!" she answered, vehemently. "I had cause to hate before you told me this, but now that I know we were *born* to be foes—now that I have your wrongs and my own humiliation to revenge—let Inez Catheron escape—*if—she—can*—the malice of Mark Talford's daughter! I am Hulda Talford's granddaughter, father, and I will live to prove myself worthy of my grandam!"

"Bless you, my Maggie—my bonny gypsy lass," he answered, as he took her in his arms and kissed her. "But it is growing late now, my darling, and you had better return. When you need me in future, put a chalk-mark upon the gatepost at the court, and I will come to meet you where I met you first—in the Oak Walk at Glandore. But come now, my lass—I hate to hurry you away—but your safe return demands it, Maggie, and you had better be going. We have no conveyances beyond our caravans, but I'll order a couple of horses prepared at once and ride with you as near as we dare go to Glandore Court. Wait a bit and I will give Ishmael the order."

He stepped toward the curtained entrance as he spoke, but my lady checked him,

"It is unnecessary, I think, father," she said. "I gave the man called Jock orders to prepare a conveyance to take me back to the cross-roads, and doubtless he attended to it as soon as he discovered that I really was your daughter. If there is no vehicle he has probably prepared a horse for me and one for the person who must accompany me, for the sake of bringing back the animal when I have done with it."

"Ay, very likely," acquiesced Marco, as he swept aside the curtain and led her out of the tent. "And I dare say that he has also appointed himself to the post of escort, if for no other reason than that it will give him some pretext for prowling about while Zillah is searching for the silver star which she has so unaccountably lost. The poor fellow is mad for love of our beautiful 'spirit child,' and has vainly wooed her for——"

He stopped abruptly, for my lady's hand had suddenly gripped his arm, and my lady's voice uttered a smothered cry.

"Maggie, dear one, what is it?" he began, as he turned and caught sight of her colorless face and distended eyes. "Good Heaven! are you ill?"

For answer my lady crept close to his side, and, lifting one trembling hand, pointed toward the camp-fire, where two human figures were standing, with the red luster of the blazing fagots agleam on their earnest faces.

They were Jock and Zillah, engaged in conversation.

"That girl—that girl!" gasped her ladyship, in a voice of terror and amazement. "Will you tell me again that I am deceived and none here is friendly to her? Look! for God's sake—look! It is Inez Catheron, father, and that man lied to me when he said she wasn't here!"

"Inez Catheron!" repeated Marco, excitedly. "Show her to me at once. Where is she, Maggie?—where? where?"

"There by the fire, talking with that man, Jock!" gulped her ladyship, nervously. "See, she is garbed like the others now, to escape detection; but she was all in white when I saw her before. Oh, I knew that I could not be mistaken. Don't you see her? There—there!"

Marco followed the direction of her outstretched hand, saw the two figures beside the camp-fire, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"I said that your fancy had deceived you, Maggie," he responded, nonchalantly. "Come, lass, let us go look for the horses. It is only Zillah, my darling, and you have nothing to fear!"

CHAPTER XX.

"DOWN, SPECTER, DOWN—I'LL NOT BELIEVE!"

My lady turned slowly, and transfixed him with a stare of utter incredulity.

Then:

"Only *Zillah*!" she gasped, in a dull, labored voice. "For God's sake, father, tell me I am mad or dreaming, or did you really say that that is the girl whom you call *Zillah*, the 'Spirit-Child'?"

"That is the girl—yes," he answered. "But why are you so terrified, Maggie? *Does* she then resemble the girl for whom you mistook her?"

"*Resemble* her!"—my lady's dilated eyes flashed back to the group by the camp-fire as she spoke, and two vivid, scarlet spots leaped like tongues of flame into her colorless cheeks. "Resemble *Inez Catheron*, do you say? My Heaven, are you all fools to be so easily duped? She is *Inez Catheron herself*!"

"It is true, I tell you—true!"—vehemently. "She is playing a dual *role*—leading a double life—and making dupes of you all. *One* day she is at Glandore Court as *Inez Catheron* the heiress, and the next she figures here as *Zillah* the Spirit Child."

Marco glanced at her with a start of nervous apprehension, and for the first time a suspicion of her sanity flashed across his mind.

"Child! child! be reasonable!" he gently said. "Such a thing would be impossible, for the tribe is often leagues away. And besides, *Zillah* scarcely ever ventures abroad during the day-time, and then she is always masked. She has been reared from childhood among my people, and for years has been attached to this tribe. It is you who are duped, Maggie, not we, and as for the white gown in which you first saw her, that is her 'devotional robe.' During these nights when the moon is at full, she is always garbed in white—as a symbol of her spiritual birth—and in that costume, with a talisman in the shape of a star upon her forehead——"

"A *silver* star!" cut in her ladyship, excitedly, her thoughts traveling back to the interview she had secretly watched on the staircase at Glandore Court. "Speak, in Heaven's name, father! Was it a silver star engraved with a motto in some strange language?"

"Yes," he answered. "It was a symbol of the star which was supreme at the time her spirit was restored, and it bore the motto, '*Salla apollis glut*,' which, in the Romany tongue, means, 'born of the blood of angels.' To-

night the star was mysteriously lost, and she has been seeking it everywhere!"

My lady caught her breath with a dull, wheezing sound, and her whole frame trembled with emotion.

"She *is* Inez Catheron, I tell you, father," she persisted—"she *is* Inez Catheron, or else—— Oh, my heart!—*could* such a thing be possible? The supposed miracle occurred in America—occurred in the very town where that tragedy was enacted; and, if I am not mad, and there are really *two*, then the likeness is due to something more than mere chance. If I could only see this Zillah closer—only hear her voice, I might detect some flaw, discover some difference."

"Shall I call her here?" suggested Marco. "She has doubtless heard of your presence in the camp, and will be only too glad to answer the summons. Shall I call her, Maggie?"

"No—no—no!" returned her ladyship, excitedly. "I wish to see her, to hear her speak, and to study her face without being seen myself! Look! the bushes are thick over there near the camp-fire. Can we not steal over there and get behind them without our presence being suspected?"

"Yes, come this way!" responded Marco, slipping behind the tent and drawing her toward the thick coppice. "Gather up your garments so that the brambles do not catch them, and tread lightly for fear the leaves will rustle. Take my hand and let me guide you. That is better. Come!"

My lady obeyed all orders, and, stealing along as though she were a shadow, made a slight detour, reached the spot some ten feet removed from the camp-fire, where Jock and Zillah stood, and sinking down upon her knees behind the bushes, gently parted the leaves and stared in breathless amazement at Inez Catheron's double.

Every feature, every gesture, every trick of the girl's flashing eyes, and every movement of her golden head was an exact counterpart of the heiress—she spoke, and Lady Blanche almost cried out, so like the voice was to Miss Catheron's own.

Jock was speaking now; and holding her breath as she crouched there in the darkness, my lady stared and listened.

"Are you holding against me what I said to-night beside the stream, Zillah?" he was saying, in a voice of sullen displeasure. "Come, now, won't you say even one kind word to me? It isn't my fault if I love you, is it? Your own foster-parents, the spirits, have put it into my heart, and surely they know what is best, my beautiful. Don't

be angry with me, Zillah. We have been friends so long—ever since we were boy and girl together—and I have loved you as no other will or can. Won't you say something to me? Please!"

"I have nothing to say," she answered, coldly, and with such a marvelous reproduction of Miss Catheron's frigid sort of politeness upon certain occasions that Lady Blanche involuntarily gripped her father's arm. "I can say nothing that will please you, I am well aware, and in that case, it is just as well—better, perhaps—to remain silent."

Jock's face reddened in the firelight, and he drove his heel into the earth with a vicious dig.

"It's hard for an honest love to be treated in this way, because you are bewitched by a man who wouldn't crook his finger to prolong your life!" he growled, in a voice of sullen wrath. "If I were a beggarly lord, now, with nothing to recommend me but a well-looking face, and no interest in you save the basest, I dare say you'd be willing to throw yourself into my arms, and worship me accordingly. But being only a gypsy, who offers you an honest love, you treat me as though I were a dog, unfit to be granted one kind word."

The girl's face, which had flushed crimson under his insulting words, now paled until it gleamed in the firelight like a marble mask.

"You are a dog!" she said, sharply, throwing back her head and regarding him with a look of righteous indignation, "for none but the most despicable of human curs would insult a woman because he cannot win her. You are well called 'Jock'—it is an ape's name, and the ape, lacking the brain, cannot distinguish the difference between the man and the monkey when they are dressed alike. No! do not trouble yourself nor distress me by further reference to the subject. I wish to hear nothing more from a man who only addresses me with slanders, and only merits indignation and contempt."

Stung by her words, Jock flushed a duller, angrier crimson, and shut his teeth with an audible click.

"What precious high heels some shoes have!" he said, with a savage laugh. "They tumble a body sometimes, my lass, and you'd better take warning."

"From you I will take nothing, and least of all—insolence!" flashed Zillah, indignantly. "Keep your solicitude until I desire it; and since you cannot lay claim to being even a Romany Rye (a gypsy gentleman), go to the kennel with your fellow-curs, and leave me in peace."

"Take care I do not leave you a dead lover as a memento of this!" snarled Jock, savagely. "If you are so wonderfully fond of this accursed Lord Keith that you are

willing to risk everything for the sake of gaining his favor, mayhap I'll take to playing the watchdog and guarding you in spite of yourself. If the apple hangs too high for me to pluck, I'll not deal lightly with the man who brings it to the dust for the mere satisfaction of trampling upon it."

Lady Blanche caught her breathe with a keen, sibilant hiss, and an expression difficult of analysis passed over her pale, pretty face.

Zillah made no reply, and stung by her silence, Jock's wrath broke out anew.

"I'm watching you—understand that!" he glowered, sullenly. "I've known for many a day that you're in love with that pale-faced swell, and I know that the love will bring you no good, just as surely as I know that he can't take such as you for a wife, and wouldn't if he could.

"I heard to-day from one of the under-keepers at Glandore Court that if Lord Keith isn't engaged to Miss Catheron, he soon will be, and with such as her in his eye, he'll not be fool enough to waste an *honest* thought upon such as you. He's taken your heart from me, curse him, and I owe him a grudge for that. But I'm not giving up hope yet, Zillah, and I never will until there's a better—or worse—reason than now. If you're an honest lass, you'll give up all thought of him when he has a wife—if you *are* fool enough to waste many on him, even as it is—but so help me Heaven, Zillah, if Lord Keith ever comes between us and puts you further from me than you are at this minute, I'll never rest night nor day until I've come up with him and had such vengeance as a gypsy should!"

He lifted his right hand with a gesture wholly theatric, swung round abruptly, and without another word, left her.

For a moment Zillah stood and looked after him, her lips quivering and her eyes assuming a mournful expression; then breaking down suddenly, she dropped upon her knees beside the fire and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, Alaric, oh, my love!" she cried out brokenly, "as though it needed his words to tell me how little hope I have, and how little you would really care for me if you knew that it was Zillah, the gypsy, and *not* Inez Catheron, the heiress, to whom you spoke those tender words, and whose head lay on your breast to-night! Oh, my love, my life, my own heart's own! why could you not love me instead of her when we are so wonderfully alike! She has all that could make life beautiful—money, jewels, position—why need she have your love also, when you

alone would be the world to me? I hate her for it! oh, I hate her for it! it seems so cruel that my life should go like this!"

And if my lady—listening behind the bushes—had long doubted, she knew now, for those words told her that Zillah, the gypsy, and Inez Catheron, the heiress, were two separate, distinct women, alike as one, loving as one, but *two* in all else.

CHAPTER XXI.

"TILL THE BLACK SLIME BETRAY HER AS SHE CRAWLS."

FOR a moment she knelt there, stunned by this astonishing discovery, and dimly foreseeing her way to the accomplishment of her revenge; then, beckoning her father to follow, she arose quickly, parted the bushes, and stepped to Zillah's side.

"My poor girl, why are you weeping?" she sweetly said, as she bent and stroked the girl's golden hair. "You seem in trouble, my dear. Can I do nothing for you?"

Zillah was on her feet in an instant, blushing, trembling, confused.

"Who are you?" she began, in a startled voice, as the firelight revealed to her the face of a stranger. Then, as she caught sight of Marco issuing from the thicket and approaching her ladyship, "Pardon me!" she humbly added. "I know now. They have told me of your presence—Pharos and the rest. You are the king's daughter, whom he so long believed dead."

"Yes, I am Marco's daughter," admitted her ladyship, with one of her sweetly seraphic smiles; "and you, I believe, are Zillah, the spirit child. You are very beautiful, my dear, and I hope we may become the best of friends. But will you not tell me the cause of your grief, Zillah? I should like to know why one so young and fair should be weeping here alone."

Zillah colored with embarrassment, and nervously fumbled with the bright fastenings of her crimson bodice.

"I—I have lost my talisman—the silver star," she stammered, "and they say—Zorah and old Redempta—that the spirits have taken it, as a sign that they will soon recall me from earth. I wore it upon my forehead this evening, and now it is gone—I know not where. But I will not annoy you with my troubles, and, if you will pardon me, I think I had better search among the bracken again—the star may have fallen there."

She made a movement to depart as she spoke, but Lady Blanche gently checked her.

"Stop a moment, Zillah, I wish to speak with you," she said; then, turning to Marco: "Please leave us together for a time, father," she added. "If you will kindly look to the horses, I shall be ready to take my departure as soon as they are prepared. You will not mind, I am sure, if I ask to speak a few words in private with this dear girl?"

"Certainly not," returned Marco. "When you are ready to go, walk down to the Hollow, Maggie, and you will find me waiting with the horses beside the stream."

Lady Blanche bowed her head as a sign that she understood, and would act accordingly; then, remaining silent until he had trudged away and left them, she turned to Zillah, and said, in a hurried voice:

"Don't start, my dear; but if you wish to know where your precious talisman is, *I* can tell you. It is at present in the keeping of one we both dislike—Inez Catheron—and it was given to her by Lord Alaric Keith!"

"By Lord Alaric Keith?"

"Yes! He found it after you left him to-night, and he gave it to *her*, believing that he was restoring it to its rightful owner," responded Lady Blanche, taking her cue from what she had overheard Zillah herself confess, and adding to it the knowledge she possessed in regard to the silver star. "You see I know of the imposition you practiced to-night, Zillah, although his lordship is in utter ignorance of it."

Zillah shrunk back with a faint, low cry, and regarded her ladyship in amazement.

"Oh, how did you discover it?" she gasped. "We were alone in the Oak Walk—Lord Keith and I—and—and I assure you that I did not try to impose upon him. He mistook me for Miss Catheron, caught me in his arms, kissed and embraced me, and I——"

"You were happy, and had not the heart to embarrass him nor cheat yourself by acknowledging the truth!" interrupted Lady Blanche, with a sleek, sweet laugh. "Dear child! I do not blame you, so you needn't wear that look of delicious confusion. I would have done the same myself had fate played me such a clever card as it has dealt to you through this miraculous resemblance. Not that I love Lord Keith, understand—for my heart is given elsewhere—but because I hate Inez Catheron, and would be willing to lend myself to any scheme which promises discomfiture to a woman who has wronged me in more ways than one, and who would have me drummed out of every reputable house in the kingdom, if she knew I was the daughter of a gypsy. More than that, she would exert herself to part me from the man I love, and if she had her

way, the doors of Glandore Court would be closed against me to-morrow."

"You are stopping there?"—in surprise. "Are you, then, a servant at that great house?"

"No, I am a guest," responded her ladyship. "My name is Lady Blanche Hay, but you must keep that secret to yourself, Zillah; I have work to perform in that house—gypsy work!"

"You do not, surely, mean robbery?"

"No, I mean vengeance, and against Inez Catheron!" returned her ladyship, sinking her voice to an intense whisper. "My mission is to strike her as she and her people have struck me and mine, and if she ever becomes Lord Alaric Keith's wife, my vow will cause me to strike him as well. Hush! do not cry out so bitterly, for I wish to ask your aid in carrying out the scheme!"

"Oh, no, no, no!" exclaimed Zillah, in a voice of agony and despair; "I could not aid you in any work that would bring the smallest pang to him, Lady Blanche. I would sooner suffer a thousand deaths than harm one hair of Lord Keith's head."

Her ladyship's eyes gleamed with satisfaction, and something like a smile of exultation moved over her rose-leaf lips.

"You love him so very well, then?" she softly said.

"I love him so well that I would lie down and let him trample upon me if I thought it would make him happier," was the frank response. "I think the seeds of this love must have been lying in my heart ever since I first saw his face, Lady Blanche; but to-night, when I rested in his arms and his lips touched mine, the seeds took deeper root and blossomed as they grew!"

"Then, believing he was in danger and you could save him, you would risk a great deal to do it, would you not, Zillah?"

"I would risk anything—anything!" responded the girl, vehemently. "I tell you, candidly, that I would even betray your relationship to Marco—even risk the wrath of the whole race of gypsies, and die the death of torture set apart by our people for the being who baffles a Romany revenge, so that I could save Lord Keith from suffering!"

Again my lady's eyes glowed, and again that smile moved across her delicate lips.

"Well done, my dear!" she said, as she patted, approvingly, the girl's golden head. "His lordship will meet with no misfortune, so that you live up to that creed and join forces with me. I owe him no grudge—as a man I respect and admire him—and unless he links his fate to Inez

Catheron's, my hand will never be raised against him. From that union he must be saved, and you must do it."

"I, Lady Blanche? Oh, how can I? I am but a poor, friendless gypsy, while Miss Catheron is rich, powerful, and"—this with a sob—"Lord Keith loves her. Ah, if you could have heard how tenderly he spoke to me to-night, when he mistook me for her; if you could have known how reverently he kissed me, and how foolishly happy it made me, even though I realized it was all meant for *her*! I could have died then, and felt myself blessed!"

"But if, instead, you could live, Zillah, and enjoy that happiness forever—if in saving him you could win for yourself the blessing of his love, and own it for a lifetime as you owned it for so brief a time to-night—what then, my dear, what then?"

"Oh, Lady Blanche, can you ask me? The world would be a paradise, and I the most blessed of earth's creatures. But such a thing may never be, you know."

"Such a thing may be, and will be, if you choose to join hands with me," responded Lady Blanche, earnestly. "But hark! that is the clock at Leith striking three, and it will be daylight before I reach the Court, if I linger to talk with you now. Come to the east wicket, at half past nine, the night after to-morrow, Zillah, and I will explain my plan to you. A glorious life—a life of peace and love with Aleric Keith—is within the grasp of your hand, and if you will only come to the east wicket——"

"I will be there, Lady Blanche!" interposed Zillah, excitedly. "Oh, my good, kind friend, I will bless you forever if such happiness can, indeed, be mine!"

"Then I shall consider myself blessed already," tittered her ladyship gayly. "Good-night, Zillah. Dream of Aleric Keith, and look upon that lovely life as yours, when you wish to live it."

Then softly moving her jeweled hand, she fluttered off and went to join her father.

She found him awaiting her with the horses beside the stream in the Hollow, and ran toward him with her pretty face radiant with happiness.

"For Heaven's sake, Maggie, what is the meaning of this affair?" he began, excitedly; but her ladyship laughed and clapped her soft hand over his mouth.

"No; don't ask me anything now!" she laughed. "Only help me into the saddle, and I will tell you as soon as we are out of the Hollow." Then as he assisted her to mount her horse and lightly sprung upon his own: "Drive fast!" she added, in a voice that shook with utter happi

ness. "Let me get somewhere that I can relieve myself by speaking, father, or I shall go mad with joy!"

With these words she struck her horse a sharp blow and rode forward at all speed; and Marco, following suit, overtook her just as she reached the high-road.

"Speak now!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "Why did you wish to talk in secret with Zillah? and what is the meaning of this sudden change in you, Maggie!"

"It is because I have found the way to my revenge, and discovered what a dupe you have been!" responded her ladyship, with an hysterical laugh. "Said I not that those precious rascals—Taric and Starlight Bess—had played a trick upon you all? Oh, wait until you have seen Inez Catheron, and you will know then who and what your precious Zillah is, and what a powerful reason we have for crushing her, after I have lured her to crush others for us!"

"Crush Zillah!" gasped Marco, whirling in his saddle and staring at her. "In the name of Heaven, Maggie, tell me—if you have not suddenly gone mad—what you mean by that?"

"I mean that I have just put two and two together, and proved you as witless as an idiot!" responded her ladyship, with passionate vehemence. "I mean that my grandmother only half accomplished her purpose when she tried to destroy the child she stole from Catheron Park. I mean that Taric and Bess lied to you all—that Kingdon Catheron's twin daughters *both* live, and that that girl, Zillah, is one of them!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE PLAY—THE PLAY'S THE THING!"

MARCO started so violently as her ladyship made this—to him—astonishing revelation, that he unwittingly jerked the horse's bridle, and with a snort and a plunge, the animal darted forward, went clattering up the moonlighted road from the Hollow, and held this pace for several rods before his rider could check his wild career.

When, however, he had succeeded in bringing the horse to a standstill, and her ladyship riding forward joined him, she found him sitting erect in the saddle, and so pale, that his face looked positively ghastly in the moonlight.

"In the name of Heaven, Maggie, are you mad!" he exclaimed, not giving Lady Blanche an opportunity to utter a word, as she cantered up to his side. "Zillah, Kingdon Catheron's daughter? *Our* Zillah the twin sister of Lord Glandore's grandchild?"

"Even *your* Zillah, if you choose to call her that!" responded Lady Blanche, in a little splenetic voice, as she leaned forward, and gave her small, dark head an emphatic twitch. "If you had used your wits and made some effort to see Inez Catheron—without wasting all these years in dreaming of a revenge which might easily have been accomplished long ago—you would be as certain of it as I now am! You have acted like a block-head, father—it may not sound very filial to say so, but it is the *truth* all the same—and I think you have good cause to bless the chance which led me to visit Bracken Hollow to-night, and put you in the way of perfecting a revenge which has been in your power for years."

"You have seen Inez Catheron, and I haven't, and there's where you have one advantage over me."

"I needn't have it for long, then," interposed Lady Blanche, sharply. "Steal into the grounds to-morrow night; get as close to the terrace as you dare at, say, nine o'clock, and I will invent some pretext—the beauty of the moonlight, for instance—to draw everybody out of the house, and you will see her then."

"I'll do it," he answered determinedly. "But you must give me some clew to her identity, so that I shall know which is she."

"No need for that. Her likeness to Zillah will prove enough to identify her, father."

"She is so very like her, then?"

"Like her?"—with a short, metallic laugh. "So like her that Inez Catheron's betrothed husband has met her and made love to her, believing her to be his *fiancee*."

"Is it possible?"

"Possible, probable, true!" returned her ladyship, with a soft laugh, not unlike the purring of a cat. "It is of that astounding resemblance I mean to make capital in this scheme for evening old scores, *mon pere*! I have a personal grudge to satisfy apart from the settlement of *your* wrongs, and I mean to kill two birds with one stone. I have a little affair of the heart to avenge upon Lord Alaric Keith—Inez Catheron's *fiance*—and in smiting *her* I mean also to pay my debt to *him*! Your precious 'spirit child' loves this Lord Keith to distraction; you overheard enough to-night to satisfy you upon that score, I fancy, and with that love I mean to wipe out all our scores!"

Marco glanced up sharply, impressed by her ladyship's calm assurance, but not quite understanding her drift.

"You're too deep for me, Maggie," he said, "and I can't quite make out what you are driving at."

"Can't you?" returned her ladyship, with another pur-

ring laugh. "Well, then, keep your appointment with me to-morrow night, and I'll make everything clear to you. There isn't time to explain it now, for, see! we are at the cross-roads, and I must leave you here. Day will break presently, and it will be dangerous for me to linger longer. I should run the risk of being seen if I passed through the grounds of the court after dawn, so I mustn't delay another moment. We must say good-night and part here, father."

She had already reined in her horse, and following suit, Marco slid down from the saddle and assisted her to alight.

"Good-night," she said, as she placed her small jeweled hand in his. "Remember the hour—at nine o'clock to-morrow night—and do not leave the grounds until I have contrived to see and speak with you in private. As soon as practicable I will steal from the others, and stroll down the Oak Walk—the place where you first met me—and I shall expect to find you there."

"I'll not forget," he answered; then suffering him to draw her to his bosom and press a kiss upon her lips, Lady Blanche drew down her veil, gathered up her draperies, and waving him adieu, darted away in the darkness, and hurried in the direction of Glandore Court.

The first streaks of dawn were already visible in the east when she emerged from the shadow of the Oak Walk and ran noiselessly up the marble steps of the mansion, to find everything just as she had left it, and the great oaken door still unlocked.

She slipped in like a shadow, soundlessly slid the bolt into its socket and turned the heavy key; then, with no more noise than a cat, she crept up the broad staircase and moved stealthily along in the direction of her own room.

As she reached the door of Lord Keith's apartments, she paused a moment and shook her small, dimpled fists at the oaken panels.

Then, with a soft, soundless laugh she slipped onward again, passed through the darkness to her own bed-chamber, and twenty minutes later was sleeping as peacefully as a little child.

At eight o'clock, her maid—true to her instructions—awoke her to receive her matutinal chocolate, was told that "miladi had passed a wretched night, and was not feeling well enough to rise for breakfast this morning;" and was then dismissed, with orders to make her mistress' excuses to Lady Elsdale and Miss Catheron, and then "keep away from the rooms until summoned to assist in the task of dressing;" which, by the way, was not

until just before luncheon; for, her ladyship, fatigued by her nocturnal escapade, slept serenely until half-past one o'clock.

She came down to the lunch-table looking none the worse for her supposed illness, and found that the day's programme had, at Lord Glandore's request, been changed upon her account—the earl maintaining that it would be eminently discourteous if the hostess should indulge in a day's outing while one of the guests was ill—so that the festivities took the form of tennis and croquet, freely interspersed with “brilliant flashes of silence,” upon the part of Lord Keith and his *fiancee*, and periods of mild flirtation for the rest of the house-party.

The engagement of the lovers was now an “open secret;” for Lord Keith, following out his original intention, had this very day, shortly after breakfast, sought an interview with the old earl, made a formal proposal for Miss Catheron's hand, and found his suit so well favored that by the time he left the library, not only was the engagement a settled question, but the wedding-day itself was named—and this by no less a person than Lord Glandore himself.

“Our house-party is to come to an end on the first of August, Inez,” his lordship said; “and as the tenth of August is the anniversary of your dear dead mother's birthday, we certainly can find no better way of celebrating it, my darling, than by the marriage of her daughter to the man of her heart. No, you needn't offer any objections, you little dissenter—seven weeks is quite time enough to prepare the bridal trousseau of a queen, when Paris and your ‘adorable Worth’ are so near by; so you may tell your aunt Alicia to order your outfit without delay, and make no more wry faces about the shortness of the time, you puss. Shortness, indeed”—with a crisp, jolly laugh—“I'll stake my life that your ‘darling Alaric’ won't complain upon *that* score—will you, you rascal?”

“Not if it were next week instead of next August,” returned his lordship, with a happy laugh. “There is certainly no obstacle to our immediate union, and, in that case, I can see no reason for delay.”

“A lover-like sentiment, truly,” exclaimed Lord Glandore, with a smile. “So we may consider the matter settled, and, instead of winding up our house-party upon the first of August, Inez, we'll prolong it to the tenth, and bring it to a close with a wedding. No, *no*, *no*, Miss Perversity, I will listen to no objections. You have ruled me with a rod of iron ever since you were four months old, and now I intend to assert my dignity for a change and have matters go *my* way this time. There, take her, Keith, and God bless the pair of you! I believe you're worthy of

her, my lad, and I know that she's worthy of the best man ever born."

So the matter was settled, and, when Miss Catheron walked out of the library with her affianced husband, the betrothal ring of the Keiths glistened on her left hand.

That alone would have been enough to betray the truth to every soul at the Court, but, under existing circumstances it became absolutely necessary to announce the engagement to the guests, so that all preparation for this brilliant wind-up to Miss Catheron's house-party might be made without delay.

Lady Blanche had heard the news from the lips of her maid—when that important factor came up to assist with her ladyship's toilet, as already stated, and, gliding to Lord Keith's side, as she entered the morning-room and found him abstractedly pulling the fringe of the window curtain, while awaiting the sound of the lunch-bell, and the consequent reappearance of the ladies, she laid one soft, bejeweled hand upon his coat sleeve and looked up into his eyes with a face all smiles and dimples.

"May one congratulate you?" she sweetly said. "I have just heard the news. I am very glad, Lord Keith—very glad, indeed; you have made a noble choice, and she is worthy of you."

"My only wish is—that I may be worthy of her," responded he, with a smile, as he gracefully acknowledged her ladyship's congratulations; then they fell to chatting in a pleasant, desultory way, until the rest of the party came trooping in, and the tinkling of the bell announced that luncheon was ready.

From that point to the time of dressing for dinner, the afternoon was rather a tedious one for Lady Blanche.

But with the knowledge that night would soon come—that night which promised to see the first actual step taken toward the fulfillment of her revengeful schemes—my lady's flagging spirits seemed to revive, and when at length she issued from her dressing-room and came downstairs—a vision of loveliness in shell-pink satin and duchess lace—she was quite her old brilliant self again; and her soft, flute-like laughter rippled sweetly out as she joined in the general conversation.

Dinner was served and dispatched, the gentlemen were left for their half hour with the walnuts and wine and cigars, while the ladies assembled in the drawing-room to discuss the relative merits of tulle and satin and faille, in connection with the coming tenth of August; then the masculine element reappeared upon the scene, and the real business of the evening—the arrangement for the proposed private theatricals—was taken up in earnest.

Here Lady Blanche Hay shone pre-eminent.

The play was selected, and the characters assigned to the several members of the party under her ladyship's skillful guidance; a list of the requisite properties and costumes was made out; orders were written for artists and carpenters to come down from London to paint the scenery and erect the mimic stage; the date of the performance was definitely settled for three weeks from to-night, and, finally, to-morrow was decided upon as the time to begin rehearsals.

"Who shall we get for 'coach' and stage-manager?" queried Miss Catheron, recollecting how her ladyship had flown into a passion when it was proposed that *she* should assume that important *role* at Lady Vail's private theatricals, and taking heed thereby not to suggest such a thing in the present instance. "Does anybody know of some competent person who might be hired to come down from the London theaters and take the affair in hand? I, for one, shall make a dismal failure of Bella (the play chosen being Robertson's delightful comedy of 'School'), unless I am properly coached."

"And I shall be something dreadful as Naomi Tighe," added Miss Ruthven, dolefully.

"Yes, and Mr. Krux in my hands promises to be something wild and diabolical, unless I am inspired—by some other fellow!" supplemented Sir Harry Charteris. "Keith will pull through with Arthur Beaufoy in fine form, and so will Endy with Jack Poyntz. They're both capital actors; but I'm awfully 'shaky' about old Krux; he's such a deuced old prig, don't you know."

"Be yourself, Charty, and you'll fill the character to the life!" drawled Sir Charles Enderby, languidly. "As 'a deuced old prig,' you're a howling success already, old man, and you'll out-coach the coach himself, even if we're fortunate enough to capture Irving. But, I say," he added, after the laughter had subsided, "who are we to get, anyhow? I'm blessed if I know anybody."

"If you think me capable of fulfilling the demand, I shall only be too happy to volunteer!" responded, smilingly, Lady Blanche Hay, whereat everybody was filled with delight, and Miss Catheron so far forgot herself as to stare at the speaker in dumb amazement; but if she could have known Lady Blanche's reasons for this extraordinary offer, her amazement would have given place to horror, and the rest of this story would never have been written.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"SNAKE, SNAKE, COME OUT OF YOUR HOLE!"

MATTERS being thus adjusted, nothing remained but to dispatch a messenger to London to secure the play-books, and make the necessary purchase of lumber and canvas for the stage and scenery, and this charge Lord Glandore intrusted to the under steward, bidding him start by the very first train he could catch this evening, in order to be back with the play-books in time for to-morrow night's rehearsal.

"And kindly purchase one or two extra copies of the play, Mr. Sleaford, in case anybody should lose one, or I should mislay the copy I have for a 'prompt-book,'" suggested Lady Blanche, with apparent artlessness, and with a most deferential bow Mr. Sleaford promised to remember her words, and then hastily retreated from the room in order to make preparations for the journey, and to catch the 9.30 train for London.

Naturally the play was the all-absorbing topic of conversation, and Lady Blanche, who kept a close watch upon the clock, meanwhile, let it remain in that channel until nine silvery strokes pealed through the room and announced the arrival of the time for which she had so long waited.

She had deftly contrived, as the minute hand approached the time, to turn the conversation to the fourth act of the play, wherein occurs that daintily-sweet scene between Lord Beaufoy and Bella, as they stroll off through the moonlight for the purpose of filling the "milk-pitcher," and now, as the silvery chimes proclaimed the hour of nine:

"Speaking of moonlight effects, let us study nature and gain some points thereby!" she twittered, in her blithe, bird-like way, as she arose and fluttered across the room to the terrace windows. "Oh, what a perfect night! If we could only counterfeit such a radiance as that with a lime-light and a reflector! Miss Catheron, Lord Keith, Sir Charles—everybody! do come and see how magnificent it is. Really, Lord Keith, you and Miss Catheron could do the 'pitcher scene' to perfection upon the terrace if you only knew the lines. Do come and see how exquisitely beautiful the moonlight is."

She fluttered out through the open window as she spoke and stood there bathed in the dazzling, steel-white, steel-cold moonlight when the others came out and joined her.

Miss Catheron was the last to issue from the window, and as the light fell full upon her—she wore to-night a

dainty costume of pale-green tulle with garnitures of leaves, grasses and white water-lilies—her soft, diaphanous draperies seemed to wrap her in a mist as though she were a spirit, and with those white blossoms clinging about her, and the moonlight glinting on her golden hair, she was not unlike a picture of some fabled nymph just risen from the river to

“ * * * Sing to that white, radiant moon,
And underneath those wistful, watching stars,
That song whose liquid sweetness draws
The souls of men to madness and to death.”

“Hello! what’s that?” exclaimed sharply Sir Harry Charteris, as Inez made her appearance. “Seems to me I heard something very much like a muffled cry over there behind that clump of bushes. I wonder if there’s a poacher skulking about? Did anybody else hear it?”

“I heard a bird pipe *somewhere* in the gardens; that is what you mean!” responded Lady Blanche, with a smile and a shrug of her white shoulders. “You are growing fanciful in your old age, *mon ami*, and too much talk of things theatrical has prepared you to discover skulking ruffians and ‘muffled cries’ everywhere!”

“It isn’t due to the effects of the play!” cut in Sir Charles Enderby. “It’s the natural outcome of the four glasses of Madeira he took as a settler after dinner. Better take warning in time, Charty, and reduce your potations—fellow with a weak top-knot is apt to see no end of terrible things if he goes anything stronger than soda!”

“Lud! Endy, what a dog’s life you must lead, then,” retorted Sir Harry, with a grin. “Dickens’ ‘Haunted Man’ must have had a mild time of it compared with you, you poor beggar!”

A general laugh resulted, and to Lady Blanche’s unspeakable relief the subject of the muffled cry was not alluded to again.

For some moments she succeeded in keeping the party there, discussing the beauties of the scene and the probability of even faintly approaching a representation of its glories upon the mimic stage; then, with a faint shiver, Miss Catheron gave the signal for returning to the drawing-room.

“Let us go in,” she said; “the air is quite chilly out here.”

“Yes, and you are very thinly dressed, Inez,” supplemented Miss Ruthven; whereupon Lady Blanche glanced at Miss Catheron’s gauzy raiment and appeared to be struck with a sudden thought.

“Dear me! how very thoughtless!” she exclaimed. “There’s that ‘point’ overdress which I washed and

mended for to-morrow, and I have forgotten to tell my maid about it. It was unfortunately torn the last time I wore it, and if I don't get it out for that thoughtless creature to darn it will never be touched till doomsday. Pray excuse me if I run up-stairs and start her working upon it at once. I will return to the drawing-room as soon as she has the mending started well enough for me to be sure that she will not ruin the garment. The lace is an heirloom—it formerly belonged to Lord Hay's grandmother—and I prize it very highly!"

Of course nobody offered the slightest objection to her ladyship's departure upon such an errand, nor felt surprised at her concern regarding the skillfulness of the mending; for the old "family lace" of the Hays was as famous as their old family jewels, and both were held almost priceless.

So, without another word, my lady fluttered up-stairs to her own apartments, gave her maid orders not to stir out of the room until she (her ladyship) came back, enveloped her dainty costume in the folds of a long dark cloak, drew the frilled hood over her head, went down and out by the rear staircase and hurried around the outside of the building until she reached the Oak Walk.

At the spot where she had first encountered him, she found her father crouching under the trees and looking as though he had just experienced some awful shock, and pausing before him she looked triumphantly up into his almost colorless face.

"Well," she said, with a smile of conscious power—"well, you have seen her, even though you did almost betray your presence by the way you cried out; and now tell me what you think of her resemblance to Zillah, and of my suspicion regarding the cause of it?"

"You were right, Maggie—right!" he gasped, in a hoarse voice of excitement. "Such a perfect likeness could not exist by any mere chance, and like you, I am convinced these girls are sisters. Merciful Heaven! *what* a resemblance. I could scarcely believe that it was *not* Zillah who stood before me, they are such perfect counterparts. Not alone their faces, but their very *voices* are the same!"

My lady laughed one of her purring, cat-like laughs, and her hazel eyes glittered like gold-stones.

"Yes," she said, in a thin, viperine voice; "and with a perfect sameness which shall avenge your wrongs and satisfy my hate for Lord Alaric Keith!"

"What will you do, Maggie?"

"Do!"—my lady came a step nearer as she spoke, her gemmed hand shut upon his arm, her slow, bleak laughter jarred upon his ears, and her eyes seemed to scintillate

in the darkness—"I will play a trick as old as the hills, but as potent to-day as it was a thousand years ago; I will change the places of these two girls, I will make the heiress the outcast, and the outcast the heiress; I will force Lord Alaric Keith into marrying a gypsy, a wandering vagabond gypsy, and when I have dragged his name through mud and mire, when I have heaped upon his head such infamy as only the malice of a scorned and revengeful woman can conceive, I will say to him: "My lord, this is *my* work, and you owe your disgrace to the hand of the woman whose love you spurned that night on the coast of Wales!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

MY LADY'S LITTLE GAME.

MY lady's voice, bitter and hard from the beginning, broke with a shrill, adder-like hiss, as she delivered herself of that infamous speech, and then silence fell.

For a moment Marco stood and looked at her, not evincing quite as much delight in this prospect of reversing the positions of the two girls as her ladyship had, perhaps, anticipated, and certainly not showing upon his scowling face any such malicious rapture as fairly shone on hers; then:

"It seems to me that you are bending all your energies to the purpose of ruining that man, and not of avenging my wrongs," he said, sullenly. "It is the daughters of Kingdon Catheron I am interested in ruining, not this Lord Keith, over whose possible disgrace you rave so constantly; and, if it's all the same to you, I don't see that your plan promises much in that line."

"Oh, you see nothing, nothing!" retorted her ladyship, sarcastically, giving her head a twitch indicative of petulant scorn. "Do nothing toward avenging *your* wrongs, indeed! I tell you it promises you a richer revenge than you ever dreamed of in your wildest hate—misery, suffering—a living hell for those you wish to smite!"

"What! in the mere changing of Zillah's position, and the defrauding of Lord Keith? Even if it were possible to manage such an affair, I don't see how it will avenge my wrongs and your mother's death!"

"Not if Inez Catheron is carried over to France or Italy, thrust into some private madhouse, and I furnish the money to keep her there to the last hour of her life?" responded her ladyship, in a shrill whisper.

"Oho! that brings the smiles to your lips and the light to your eyes, does it? And you begin to realize at last, do

you, what sort of vengeance a woman can plan when hatred spurs her wits?"

"Good Heaven! what a revenge—what a revenge!" he exclaimed, in a voice that thrilled with unspeakable joy. "To be shut up in a madhouse vainly shrieking for help and dying by inches, as she slowly realizes that rescue can never reach her! Oh, it would be worse a thousand-fold than the agony which drove your poor mother mad, my lass, and even *she* could ask no worse retaliation. But *can* it be done—*can* it, Maggie?"

"Yes, with your assistance!" returned her ladyship. "I will meet you at the cross-roads to-morrow morning, in the neighborhood of eleven o'clock, and supply you with money to begin operations at once. First of all you must seek and *find* some private madhouse outside of England, where the proprietor can either be induced to accept money for taking charge of a sane woman, or can be gulled into believing her a lunatic, whose mania takes the shape of believing herself to be an English heiress who has been abducted from home.

"After those arrangements have been made you must find some one to assist you in her removal. Money will buy you such a confederate, for this is not work for Romanies, and no gypsy must be appealed to for aid. Three weeks from to-night, you and this, as yet, unknown confederate must be at the east wicket of Glandore Court with a closed vehicle, and when Inez Catheron comes there——"

"But *will* she come?" interrupted Marco, excitedly. "How can you arrange that, Maggie?"

"Leave it to me. I will find a way to get her there, never fear; and when she does come you must be prepared to chloroform her, get her into the vehicle, and be off as speedily as possible. I should advise you to be well supplied with drugs, to prevent her reviving at some inopportune moment, and, if possible, to keep her unconscious throughout the entire trip. Once in a maniac's cell, you have nothing more to dread, for there will be plenty of money supplied to keep her there.

"No search will be instituted, because her disappearance will not be suspected, and if some kindly-disposed person at the madhouse should even be officious enough to write to Glandore Court for the purpose of ascertaining if there be any gleam of truth in what she says about her name and abduction, the earl will indignantly deny it, and accepting Zillah for Inez, declare that his granddaughter is still here."

"By Heaven, it is glorious!" exclaimed Marco, delightedly; then, as another thought came, his face fell, and the look of rapture faded.

"But what of Zillah herself, Maggie?" he gloomily said. "She is also Kingdon Catheron's daughter, recollect, and we must have vengeance upon both. It will be no hardship for her, if she is lifted out of poverty into wealth, and, in addition, married to a man she loves!"

My lady laughed, and made a deriding gesture.

"Do you think I will spare her, when she is to be the instrument of my vengeance upon *him*?" she answered. "That she will consent to the imposition, in the belief that by so doing she will save Lord Keith's life, I am quite sure. I paved the way for that last night; and when she comes the night after to-morrow to keep her appointment with me at the wicket, before she leaves it she will have given her consent to impersonate Inez Catheron; and from the hour she becomes Lord Keith's bride, her life will be a hell. I have my own plans for her punishment and his misery, and your fiery-tempered gypsy, Jock, will play a leading part in the little tragedy I have devised.

"For the present, however, he must be kept in complete ignorance of the character she is going to assume, and it is absolutely necessary that not one of the whole tribe of gypsies shall know when, nor where, nor how she disappeared! She must simply pass out of their lives, and the tribe must leave Bracken Hollow the morning after she goes!"

"But such a thing is impossible, Maggie. You know how she is revered on account of the lies Taric and Starlight Bess told in regard to the supposed miracle of her soul's return after death," interposed Marco. "If she disappears, not alone the tribe with which she has been identified, but the entire race of gypsies, will be up in arms upon the instant. A general alarm will be sent out, the description of her appearance will be circulated everywhere, and a search instituted at once."

"That you must prevent, father," returned Lady Blanche.

"I? Impossible, child! How *could* I do such a thing?"

"By using your wits from the moment you return to Bracken Hollow," was the calm response. "Do you not remember what that woman—that Old Redempta—said last night, when you mentioned the loss of Zillah's talisman, the silver star? It was her opinion—so she said—that the star had not been lost, but had been *taken* from Zillah's forehead by the hands of the spirits who are supposed to watch over her. To quote Old Redempta's own words, she believed 'That it had been taken as a sign that those same spirits meant soon to recall the girl herself, and take back her soul in the same mysterious manner

in which they formerly replaced it in the body of the dead.'

"That belief you must begin to foster at once, until it becomes universal throughout the entire tribe; and on the night of Zillah's disappearance, you must pretend to have seen her taken. I leave it to your own genius to draw a stirring picture of how you saw her fade away before your very eyes, or watched her soaring up to the stars, or any other clap-trap yarn you choose to tell. It will be believed—have no fear of that—if you only take time by the forelock, and spread Old Redempta's crazy prediction. But, hark! I hear the sound of voices. Some of Miss Catheron's guests have, doubtless, come out for a short stroll in the moonlight, and I must leave you at once. They believe me up-stairs with my maid, and it might, perhaps, be fatal to our plans if I were seen out here after that. Good-night, father; remember all that I have told you, and be certain to meet me at the cross-roads at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I'll not fail you, never fear," he answered. "Good-night, my lass, and good luck go with you."

Then with a simple wave of the hand, they glided out of the Oak Walk into the grove, and went their separate ways.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THE DEVIL TEMPTED ME AND I DID EAT."

" 'Some day, some day,
Some day I shall meet you!' "

Hummed, softly, Lady Blanche Hay, as she came tripping down-stairs, arrayed in a striking dinner-dress of old rose silk combined with sulphur-colored plush, and richly embroidered in trailing sprays of white and yellow honeysuckle—a Worth creation which had made a decided sensation in London when my lady first wore it—and bearing in her small gloved hands a thin, paper-covered book, upon which the word "SCHOOL" was distinctly visible.

The time was six o'clock in the evening—two days after the incidents narrated in the preceding chapter—and my lady was popularly supposed to be, like the rest of the feminine element at Glandore Court, in the midst of her preparations for dinner instead of having reached their termination, for it was considerably less than half an hour since the tinkling of the dressing-bell had sent the ladies scurrying up-stairs to give themselves into the hands of their maids; and as an hour and a half was usually the time spent in *that* way, my lady's appearance produced a stare of astonishment upon the part of the gentlemen when

she came fluttering out upon the great stone terrace where they were all clustered, talking politics and discussing a last cigar before dawdling up-stairs to begin their own quickly executed toilets.

"Well, by George! what's going to happen?" exclaimed, laughingly, Sir Harry Charteris, as her ladyship made her appearance, book in hand, and with a long, hooded gray cloak thrown over her arm. "Talk of electricity and all that—why, they're snail's capers compared to your rate of speed, Lady Blanche, and if the millennium isn't due this evening, then it must be blessed near at hand, for this is certainly an evidence that the world has advanced to a state where its destruction is inevitable!"

"Meaning that a woman who makes a dinner toilet in precisely twenty-four minutes is the last straw which breaks the back of Heaven's forbearance, Sir Harry?" smiled her ladyship, sweetly. "Ah, well, I have only exemplified what you 'male monsters' have been aware of for many a day; that woman is a very unreliable article and sometimes a very deceptive one. Deceptive, because she takes ninety minutes every day in the week to do what I have shown you can be done in less than one-third of that time!"

"And done charmingly at that, I assure you, Lady Blanche," interpolated the old earl, "most charmingly, indeed—eh, Keith?"

"Very!" assented Lord Keith, graciously. "But then to look charming upon all occasions has been a trick of Lady Blanche's all her life long."

"Oh, ye men—ye flatterers, that buzz and drip honey like a burdened bee!" quoted Lady Blanche, gayly. "I shall either have an exaggerated opinion of myself, or a most deplorable one of the rest of my sex, if I stay here and listen to any more of your nonsense, and as I wish to escape both, permit me to beat a hasty retreat. Sir Charles, as you are the only one who has not wounded mine ears with words of 'cruel kindness,' I accord you the post of honor. Pray assist me in donning this cloak, and you, Lord Keith, as the greatest flatterer of them all, please hold this play-book, while I arrange myself for my visit to the summer-house beside the mere."

"Surely you are not going to leave us so soon!" exclaimed Lord Keith, as Sir Charles Enderby hastened to obey the injunction, and my lady, arranging her elaborate toilet so that it would not suffer by coming in contact with the earth, proceeded to slip into the cloak and draw its frilled hood over her dark hair. "And, worse than leaving us, go for a walk to the mere in that costume?"

"Why not?" she answered, gayly, as she took the play-book from him. "Do you not see that I have donned my walking-boots instead of my slippers? I dressed hastily for the express purpose of having an hour to myself before dinner."

"Which means that we all bore you so dreadfully that you are eager to get 'far from the madding crowd' for at least sixty minutes?"

"On the contrary, it means that I am not on pleasure bent, but upon duty," returned her ladyship, smilingly, as she arranged the folds of her cloak so that it completely hid her charming costume.

"I think that we do not get the stage 'business' of the first act quite correctly, Lord Keith. At our first rehearsal last evening, the grouping was wretched, and the end of the act—where the schoolgirls all march away and leave Jack Poyntz and Lord Beaufoy, you know—it seemed to me that we bungled the business terribly; so I'm just going down to the summer-house, where it is all nice and quiet, and there I shall read the first act over carefully and see if I can't discover where the difficulty lies and how to overcome it smoothly. I have my pencil and some slips of paper, you see, so that I may jot down the ideas as they come to me; and as I shall require perfect quiet to collect my thoughts, woe to the man who dares to approach or disturb me for the next hour. *Until then, allons, mes-sieurs, I remain invisible!*"

Then, with a sweet, soft laugh, and a graceful movement of her head, she glided by them, tripped down the steps of the terrace, and fluttered out of sight down the winding, wooded walk which led to the mere of Glandore.

But while the mere and the summer-house were certainly the Mecca of my lady's twilight pilgrimage, just as certainly the stage business of the comedy—which they had rehearsed last night with more success than usually attends the first rehearsal of amateur theatricals—had nothing whatsoever to do with it, for, once out of sight and sound of the party on the terrace, she crumpled up the slips of paper to which she had called Lord Keith's attention, threw them into the thickest part of the shrubbery, slid her tiny golden pencil into her pocket, and glanced sharply about her—to make sure that no one had witnessed her actions—before she resumed her journey.

She was in excellent temper this evening, for everything had thus far progressed as she wished, and her scheme of vengeance was already in working order.

True to her agreement, she had met her father at the cross-roads yesterday morning, and supplied him with the necessary funds for beginning his rascally operations

against Inez Catheron; had heard with delight that he had already begun to foster among the gypsies the belief which Old Redempta had first expressed regarding the lost talisman, and the ultimate disappearance of Zillah, and her journey to the mere this evening, was in direct connection therewith.

It lay, this mere toward which she was hastening, within a stone's throw of the east wicket, and at least an eighth of a mile removed from the mansion itself—a broad, beautiful sheet of water, where swans swam among the matted pond lilies, and tall trees shaded the romantic walk which ran along its brim, a dense growth of rhododendrons shutting it in with a wall of foliage and flowers, and clustering thickest about a rustic summer-house which stood upon the very verge of the picturesque sylvan lake.

Toward this summer-house my lady now bent her steps, as she made her way into the rustic walk which we have described, and, pausing as she reached it to take one last cautious look about her, she brushed aside the shrubbery which clustered about the entrance, glided in, and found herself in the presence of a veiled figure, which arose as she entered, and, removing the double fold of gauze which screened her features, revealed the face of Zillah.

"You are an excellent tryster, my dear," twittered Lady Blanche, as she dropped a cool kiss upon the girl's pale cheek, and then softly drew her down upon a rustic seat beside herself. "Then my father did not fail in his promise to tell you of the change which I was obliged to make in the time and place of our appointment?"

"Yes, Marco told me!" responded Zillah, with a faint smile. "He said that unforeseen circumstances would prevent your coming to meet me at the east wicket to-night at nine o'clock, as you had previously arranged, and that, instead, I was to steal into the grounds and come to this place at six, and, moreover, I must use extra precaution to keep my face concealed from all but the members of our tribe."

"And so you must, my dear," returned her ladyship, with great earnestness. "The success of my plan to save the life of the man you love, and prevent him falling a victim to Romany vengeance depends upon that, Zillah. Be careful—be *very* careful—that no one about this place ever catches a glimpse of your face, my dear; and now"—as she produced the play-book which she had brought with her—"let me explain to you what I desire you to do, and give you a few instructions in an art of which I fear you know but little."

"But—but you told me I was to come here and learn how I could save Lord Keith's life, Lady Blanche!" ex-

claimed Zillah, in a troubled voice. "Pray do not torture me by speaking of anything else at present. I have been suffering untold agonies since the night you told me of his danger, and I wish to know—oh, I *must* know—how I can save him and win from him the love which you told me was possible for such a nameless outcast to obtain!"

"So you shall, my dear," smiled Lady Blanche, caressing the girl's golden head, and looking tenderly into her beautiful, solemn eyes. "What I wish to speak of now is merely a preface to what you are so anxious to hear, and in due time I will reach that more important part. As my father tells me, the miracle of your birth—or rather your *second* birth, dear—has gained for you advantages which you could never have obtained otherwise. That is to say, you have been well educated—not brilliantly, of course—but very well, indeed."

"Yes, I have had tutors—if that is what you mean—but they were never permitted to look upon the face of their pupil," admitted Zillah. "I have no reason to complain of what my people have done for me, Lady Blanche. It is they who should do *that*; for the more I have learned the more it has taught me to become skeptical regarding the supposed miracle of my birth. It seems so absurd, so very unnatural, that——"

"We will not discuss that part of the subject," interrupted her ladyship, with a smile and a gentle gesture of dissent. "So long as you have been educated enough to fit you for the work you have to do in the future, it matters not why nor how it was done, my dear. You have never, of course, seen a play performed upon the stage, but you have intelligence enough to understand what you read, and I wish you to memorize carefully the character of Bella in this one, and be prepared to play it at a moment's notice. The necessary instructions regarding what you are to do—it is called 'the business' in theatrical parlance, my dear—I will give you in private, here in this summer-house, at such times as can be conveniently arranged between us. I wish you to have the part learned perfectly before a fortnight passes. You can do that, I presume?"

"Yes, I can do that," returned Zillah, as she took the book. "But when am I to play this part, and where, Lady Blanche?"

"You are to play it here at Glandore Court two weeks from to-morrow night."

"Here, Lady Blanche?"—in amazement.

"Even here, my dear; and, moreover, the part of Lord Beaufoy—your lover in the play—is to be assumed by Lord Alaric Keith!"

"Lord Keith!" replied Zillah, her eyes lighting, and her whole face becoming radiant with happiness. "Oh, Lady Blanch, shall I, indeed, meet him and talk with him—and before everybody? Oh, it cannot be possible! The Earl of Glandore is so bitterly opposed to gypsies that he will not permit me to cross his threshold, and, as for Lord Keith, ah! I am very sure that he will not consent to this arrangement; and, if he knows——"

"He will not know—he will *never* know!" cut in Lady Blanche, sharply. "He will believe that you are Miss Catheron, and not Zillah, the gypsy—they will *all* believe that you are the heiress, instead of the outcast you really are, and the deception you practice that night you will *continue* to practice to the end of your life!"

"You mean," gasped Zillah, growing very pale—"oh, Lady Blanche, you mean that I am to trade upon my resemblance to Miss Catheron, and—and cheat her out of her rights?"

"I mean that you are to become a rich woman—a happy woman, respected by those who now shrink from all of your race and class—idolized by Lord Glandore, petted by the Countess of Elsdale, and worshiped to the end of your days by Lord Alaric Keith!" responded her ladyship, eagerly.

"Here!" she added, hastily, as she removed her cloak, and rising, revealed herself in all the sumptuousness of her charming dinner costume. "How would you like to dress like this all the days of your life, my dear, instead of in those dingy garments you now wear? How would you like to have diamonds as superb as these? A hundred gowns to choose from, a hundred times a hundred pounds to spend on jewels, laces, flowers, ribbons, and the thousand articles of adornment we women love? How would you like to give up the forest for a home like this? Your gypsy tent for a boudoir, with walls of fluted silk, your bed of straw for a couch of down, curtained with hangings of rich brocade? How would you like to have men marveling over your beauty and your enormous wealth, women going mad with envy over your jewels and dresses, and, sweetest of all, Lord Keith's eyes lighting with pleasure every time you approach, or people comment upon the loveliness of his thrice blessed wife?"

"Oh, my lady! oh, my lady!" gasped Zillah, clapping her hands and flushing with ecstasy. "Can you ask me such a thing? Ah, it would be a perfect heaven, and life one string of endless joys—— But"—with sudden mournfulness—"I should be forever haunted by the fear of the fraud being discovered, forever reproached by my conscience for having wronged a woman who never harmed

me in my life, for having cheated her of her fortune, her husband, and her home!"

"Nay," responded Lady Blanche, excitedly. "Say, rather, that you would be forever blessed by the knowledge that you had made happy the man you loved, and in doing it, saved his life. Listen, Zillah! The wedding of Lord Keith and Inez Catheron is set for the tenth of August, and if you do not love him well enough to save him before that day comes around, his life must pay the forfeit of his union with Inez Catheron, and *both* will fall victims to gypsy vengeance before the honeymoon has waned. You cannot save Inez Catheron from her impending doom—it is as fixed as fate itself. But you can save Lord Keith by this act of deception, and he will never know the difference—never know but that he has married Miss Catheron, the heiress; and, believing that you are she, lavish upon you the love for which you now so vainly long."

"Oh! do not tempt me—do not tempt me," interposed Zillah, feebly. "I am very weak, Lady Blanche, and it is heaven which you hold out to me—heaven!"

"Then why not seize it, Zillah? Why not bless him and bless yourself? Why not become rich, honored, and loved, where you are now poor, despised, forlorn? Child, it is for your own good I speak—because you are a Romany, and one of *my* people, dear; and because, respecting the man you *love*, I would save him, if I can, from a fate he does not merit. But Inez Catheron you cannot save; she falls whether you consent to this or not. So that in saving Lord Keith and making both him and yourself happy, you wrong no one upon this earth. Ah! say that you consent—say that you consent."

"But my people?—the people of my tribe!" interposed the girl, feebly. "Oh, Lady Blanche, will they not learn of this deception? Will they not search for me when I disappear?"

"No; Marco, who knows of my plans, has promised that the tribe shall leave this neighborhood directly you forsake it, and he will arrange matters so that your disappearance will be satisfactorily accounted for," returned Lady Blanche; then giving the girl a sketchy account of her plans in relation to Old Redempta's prophecy regarding the lost talisman, she pressed her anew to consent to the conspiracy.

Bit by bit the girl's unwillingness gave way before my lady's crafty arguments and honeyed words, one by one her fears were beaten down, and her hopes built up, until with one great sob of utter happiness:

"Say no more, Lady Blanche—say no more, I consent!" she uttered faintly. "To save him I am willing to do any-

thing, but in addition to that, to win his love and become his *wife*. Ah, Heaven were surely less beautiful than my life will be after that!"

My lady smiled—a perfect smile of satisfaction—as she took her in her arms and kissed her, and for some moments there was complete silence, while the tempted lay with her face hidden upon the shoulder of the tempter—too foolishly happy to do aught but dream of that beautifully pictured future.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"MARRY! BUT HERE'S A VIXEN."

"You have chosen well, Zillah—very well, my dear," murmured Lady Blanche, after a pause, as she gently raised the girl's drooping head, and, taking her face between her palms, smiled sweetly into it. "Why, you are fairly radiant, my darling, and who could doubt the blissfulness of your future when you love Lord Keith like this?"

"But if he should discover the truth some time, Lady Blanche? If I should make some foolish blunder?"

"I will take measures to prevent such a thing as that," returned her ladyship; and, in order that I may be always near you, to prompt you if your memory fails, and advise you until you become accustomed to your new position, you must invite me to become your guest for a year or two, and appear to conceive a great liking for me."

"Indeed, I shall not have to *appear* to do that," responded Zillah, with a frank, sweet smile; "for I shall only have to remember that all the happiness I shall ever know in this world has come to me through you, dear Lady Blanche, and I shall love you and be grateful to you always."

"I hope so, my dear," twittered her ladyship, dropping another Judas-like kiss upon the beautiful face of her unconscious dupe. "And now, as I shall have to hasten back to the house, we will have to part, my dear. Take the play-book and study your part carefully, then come daily to the east wicket—but always closely veiled, remember—and whenever you find a bit of ribbon hanging upon the gate-post, go into the woods and wait there until I come to instruct you in your dual *role* of actress and future heiress.

"When next I meet you I will bring you a list containing the names, and a full description of all the guests and servants at the Court, so that you can study them and make no blunder in that direction. Now, then, pull down

your veil, dear, and steal back to Bracken Hollow as fast as you can, and, if it is possible for me to meet you to-morrow, I will do so. Good-bye, my darling; no longer Zillah the outcast, but Inez Catheron, the heiress, and Lady Keith that is to be."

"Good-bye," answered the girl, with a sob of utter happiness. "Good-bye, and God bless you, Lady Blanche. Only Heaven knows how much I shall owe to you."

Then deftly parting the shrubbery and waving her small, ringless hand, she darted off and vanished among the trees.

My lady stood and looked after her for a moment, her pretty face alight with smiles, her hazel eyes glistening; then with a sleek, low laugh, she readjusted her cloak and softly left the summer-house.

That night, when the comedy was rehearsed in the picture-gallery, it was evident to all the gentlemen that my lady's visit to the summer-house had resulted favorably in regard to the business of the play, for everything ran along as smoothly as could be desired, and the troublesome "animated tableau" at the close of the first act was arranged so gracefully that the actors themselves accorded her ladyship a burst of hearty applause.

From that time to the close of the rehearsals, matters kept growing better and better; for, whenever my lady detected any trifling error, somebody was sure to suggest a visit to the summer-house by the mere. My lady was just as sure to act upon the suggestion, and always, when she came back from these afternoon trips, the difficulty ceased to exist.

So the days came and went, and the night set for the performance kept drawing nearer.

The invitations had long been sent out to the resident gentry, and all concerned, actors and prospective auditors alike, were in a state of blissful excitement as the date of the auspicious event approached.

Everything had been placed in Lady Blanche's hands, even to the ordering of the costumes, which, upon arrival were carried to her rooms for inspection before they were accepted and distributed to those who were to wear them, and if there was a duplicate of one particular dress which had been ordered for Bella, nobody knew it but my lady, and instead of complaining to the costumer, she paid him for the duplicate out of her private purse, and then stowed the costume away in the back of her wardrobe.

But this was not the only act of my lady's of which no one at Glandore Court had the slightest inkling, for there were many afternoons spent in the Leith woods, coaching

Zillah, and there was one hour spent in Bracken Hollow, in the dead of the night, making arrangements with Marco, who had returned, successful, from his efforts to secure assistance, etc., in the performance of my lady's inhuman scheme in regard to Inez Catheron, and also in arranging with Zillah to be at a certain spot near the doorway of the wing staircase at a certain hour upon the night of the private theatricals.

So matters progressed upon all sides, without a hitch or a blunder, until the day, big with fate, came around, and then—deplorable mishap—my lady met with a “severe injury.”

Nobody seemed to know just how it happened, but my lady's dear little right hand was hurt by one of those big blundering carpenters, and she had to bandage it and carry it in a sling; and Lord Glandore swore that he would dismiss the blundering idiot and send him flying back to London if her ladyship would only point him out.

But her ladyship couldn't do it—“she really wasn't aware which man it was, etc.; and as it was quite accidental, she preferred not to say anything about it;” so, of course, the matter was dropped; and although everybody knew it must be terribly painful and badly bruised (for she kept it entirely hidden), my lady was as gay and happy as ever, and went on preparing for the entertainment with the same sweet smile of yesterday.

Of course it was inconvenient, too; but then my lady knew her game, and didn't show what difficulty it cost her until four o'clock in the afternoon.

At that hour all the other ladies were in their separate apartments enjoying a siesta, against the extra exertion of the coming evening. But Lady Blanche, indefatigable little worker—was still on business bent, and finding Lord Keith smoking in solitary state amongst the roses, fluttered up to him, looking dreadfully nervous and very much excited.

“Oh, Lord Keith, I am in such trouble!” she exclaimed, in apparent agitation. “I have just received a letter containing very bad news”—this with a pretty trick of seeming confusion—“the ‘somebody’ of whose existence I spoke when I told you how I had lived to thank you, for that miserable Welch experience, is deeply concerned.”

“He—he will be here this evening among the guests, and I wish to send him a note the instant he arrives. But this wretched injury of my hand renders it impossible for me to write a word, so I have come to you to ask you if you will consent to do me a great favor. I have told no one of my engagement but you, and as I do not

care to admit any one else to my confidence, I thought, I hoped, that is, I wished to ask if you would write the letter for me?"

"Why, certainly, Lady Blanche. Nothing would afford me greater pleasure than to be of service to you!" returned his lordship, as he tossed away his cigar. "Shall we go into the library?"

"If you would be so kind," smiled her ladyship. Writing materials are always to be found there; and, besides, it is probably vacant at this hour, so that I can dictate the letter without fear of listeners. Since you are aware of the true state of affairs, I need not feel embarrassed by what I have to say."

"If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly!" quoted his lordship with a smile; then leading the way to the library, he seated himself before the desk set apart for the use of the guests, and taking some sheets of paper from a pigeon-hole, announced himself ready to begin.

My lady closed the door, and walking to the desk, stood up behind his chair—as though embarrassed by the situation—and in a wavering voice slowly dictated the following:

"MY DARLING,—When this is handed to you, excuse yourself—no matter how urgent the matter which detains you—and come to me at once. Dearest, I have this instant received some terrible news, which must delay, and may forever prevent the possibility of our marriage. It all rests with you, my darling; but I cannot go on with the play, nor give it my attention, until I have seen and spoken with you. I shall await you under the rhododendrons at the east wicket, and if you love me, come there the very instant you receive this. I shall detain you but a few minutes, yet upon those minutes hangs the whole future of our two lives.

"Your devoted but distracted

"BLANCHE."

Word for word, as it fell from my lady's lips, Lord Keith wrote that letter, and then passed it to her for inspection.

"Thank you—oh, thank you ever so much," she said, earnestly. "You have helped me over a great difficulty, Lord Keith, and I cannot express to you how grateful I am."

"Pray do not try, then," he answered, with a smile, as he pushed back his chair and arose. "Can I do nothing more for you, Lady Blanche?"

"Nothing, thank you; this is all I require."

His lordship bowed courteously and retired from the room, but scarcely had the door closed upon him ere my lady performed a delighted double shuffle, which proclaimed what an adept she had been in her old theatrical days.

"I have you—I have you on the hip, my Lord Alaric Keith!" she exclaimed, in a suppressed voice of exultation, then, with lightning-like rapidity, her "poor wounded hand" came out of its sling, and she fell to tearing open the blank envelope in which his lordship had sealed that urgent message.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TIGHTENING SNARE.

It occupied but a moment of time to bring it again into view, then, hastily cramming the torn envelope into her pocket, my lady unfolded the letter itself, spread it out flat upon the desk, and, taking up the ink-bottle, spilled a portion of its contents over the signature "Blanche," and a portion of the word preceding it.

She allowed the little pool of ink to lie there a moment, until it had soaked into the word, then she raised the sheet, let the ink trickle off into the waste-basket, then ran the blotter over the written page, and, when she again inspected it, the signature was entirely obliterated.

"Written in great haste, and the ink bottle overturned, in the excitement of a half-distracted man!" she laughed, as she carefully dried the letter by waving it to and fro, and then fell to covering the ink-spotted papers in the waste-basket by tucking them under the unsoiled scraps. "The letter is unsigned, but the writing is yours, Lord Keith; it is addressed, 'My Darling,' and you have but *one*. It will work, my lord; it will work to a charm, and, when you have for a wife a woman whose secret is in my hands, you will know what it costs to make an enemy of me!"

Speaking, she folded the now dry letter, slid it into another envelope, and without sealing it thrust it into her pocket and silently left the room.

* * * * *

It was eight by all the clocks and watches at Glاندore—eight o'clock, and the night and the hour were here.

Before and behind the crimson curtain of the mimic stage all was bustle and confusion.

An orchestra of twenty pieces was discoursing a brilliant overture to the play—and giving evidence of what good things it could discourse for the dance which was to follow the comedy—in the closely arranged seats was

packed an expectant assemblage, rustling satin programmes and chatting merrily as it waited for an opportunity to fix its four hundred eyes upon the mysteries which as yet lay hidden by that red silk curtain, and everywhere there was the flash of bright jewels, the gleam of gay toilets, the sunshine of smiles, and the evidence of universal pleasure.

Behind the scenes my lady reigned supreme, darting with a suggestion to the stage carpenters here, a gracious appeal to the gasman's assistance there, and a timely word to each and every one of the amateur actors wherever encountered.

"My dear Miss Ruthven, you make a charming Naomi," she twittered, in her blithe, bird-like way. "But had you not better darken your complexion just a trifle more—Naomi Tighe is an East Indian heiress according to the author, and the East Indians are usually somewhat swarthy. Dear Lady Elsdale, you are Miss Sutcliffe to the life. I am delighted—delighted with you all. You are a perfect embodiment of Beaufoy, Lord Keith, but where in the world is your beloved Bella?"

"Ah, here she is!"—as Inez, in the simple costume of the heroine, came tripping from the "wings," and exposed herself to the full glare of the "border lights." "Do let me have a look at you, Miss Catheron. How well that simple gown becomes you, to be sure! I predicted that you would be an ideal Bella, and you are fulfilling the prediction splendidly. But, good gracious, my dear"—as her eye fell upon the gleaming betrothal ring which glittered upon Miss Catheron's white hand—"you must certainly remove that jewel to be in keeping with the character. Recollect that Bella is a charity scholar, dependent upon the bounty of the good doctor and Mrs. Sutcliffe, and she would scarcely be possessed of such a superb jewel as that. Give it to me, my dear, and I will keep it for you until after the performance."

Miss Catheron colored faintly and glanced at Lord Keith.

"I do not like to remove it," she said confusedly. "I wish to wear it from the moment it was placed upon my finger until the day of my death. I am sorry now that I assumed the character of Bella; I should not have done so had I known this. Perhaps I could cover it some way, Lady Blanche?"

"Oh, dear, no; don't think of such a thing," responded her ladyship. "But if you are superstitious regarding its removal, let Lord Keith take it off, and put it on again at the end of the play."

"And give again the pledge I gave with it at first, my

darling," softly murmured his lordship, as he took her white hand, and slowly drew off the betrothal ring. "What can it matter, Inez, when our happiness is already assured?"

"I do not know—I cannot tell!" she answered, faintly. "Call me superstitious, if you will, Alaric, but I feel that the removal of a betrothal ring is unlucky; and if I had thought of this I would have declined to play the part of Bella."

"Not *my* Bella, I hope?" he softly whispered; and leaving them thus my lady suddenly bethought (?) herself that she had left the prompt-book in her own room, and, ignoring the presence of her maid, excused herself for a moment and darted away.

But not to her room at first. Reaching the upper corridor, now deserted, for all were busy below, she darted to the wing-staircase, ran fleetly down, unlocked the door, and called:

"Zillah!"

The gypsy glided from the shadow of the shrubbery and joined her on the threshold, then with a word of caution, my lady drew her into the passage, locked the door and beckoning her to follow, led the way to her own room, then hastily drawing from the wardrobe the duplicate of Inez Catheron's costume, she tossed it to her.

"Lock the door and dress yourself as quickly as possible!" she whispered, hurriedly. "When you hear the orchestra cease playing the interlude between the first and second acts, come out and descend the staircase on the left of the corridor outside. Remember! the *left*!"

"I will remember, Lady Blanche," responded Zillah, faintly. "But, oh, I—I am so troubled—so nervous. I am afraid I am doing wrong to aid in this deception, and if evil should come of it——"

"Evil cannot come of it—it is all good, all good!" interrupted Lady Blanche with a laugh, then, fluttering out of the room she closed the door behind her, took the prompt-book from her pocket, and ran fleetly back to the stage.

"Places, places!" she called out excitedly, as the overture ceased, and an expectant hush fell over the assembled auditors. "Turn up the gas, if you please, Mr. Limelight. There, that will do. Every body ready to begin?"

For a second her eager eyes swept the stage, as if to be sure that all was as it should be, there was a momentary hush, then the sharp tinkling of a bell, the red silk curtain rolled softly up, and the private theatricals began.

[CHAPTER XXVIII.]

"TO BE OR NOT TO BE?"

FROM the moment the curtain rolled up and revealed all the schoolgirls clustered about Bella, and listening intently while she read to them the story of Cinderella, everybody knew that the performance was going to be a success.

"A hit! a palpable hit!" exclaimed Sir Harry Charteris, as he came off the stage and encountered her ladyship standing in the wings with the prompt-book in her hand, and her pretty face aglow with excitement. "You've made the thing a howling success, Lady Blanche, and everybody's amazed over it—everybody 'in front,' I mean. I suppose we ought to 'talk shop,' since you've made the affair on a footing with a professional performance."

"Have I?" smiled her ladyship, lifting her bright hazel eyes, and acknowledging the compliment with a smile. "'I do protest; this honor is too great.' I haven't made it; I have only assisted. I couldn't make you act, you know, had you all been sticks. I have only developed a lot of really clever people who didn't know what they could do until now; and if the result pleases our friends, I am sure I am more than satisfied."

"Pleases them! Why, it has simply staggered them," responded Sir Harry. "Chris Newall just peeped in a moment ago, and told me that he considered it better than anything he ever saw at the Lyceum; and, as for Lady Clavering—lud! she's so green with envy that her face looks like a spring pippin. The Clavering theatricals have carried the lead for two seasons, you know, but we out-distanced them so badly that her ladyship looks fit to burst with mortification."

Her ladyship laughed good humoredly as he dawdled away, and, turning to Lord Keith, who was standing near by, begged him—for her "injured" hand was still wrapped in a silken bandage—to find the place for her.

"You seem in excellent spirits to-night, Lady Blanche," he smiled, as he flirted over the leaves of the prompt-book, and, having found the proper place, passed it back to her, with a deferential bow. "That argues well for the issue of your fears this afternoon. Would it be presuming too much should I ask if I have been a success as an amanuensis."

Her radiant face told him, as she lifted it, that she did not regard the question as presumptuous.

"You have been a perfect success, Lord Keith!" she answered, with marked emphasis upon the adjective.

"Knowing what threatened me, do you fancy I would be like this to-night if all had not gone well? I think you must be a good genius. At any rate you are a lucky amanuensis, and I must congratulate myself for having engaged your services."

"I am glad of it," he smiled in return. "If ill fortune threatens you again, you will know where to turn. Employ me as often as you wish—I am at your service always."

"You are very kind. I shall remember that!" twittered her ladyship, gayly, her hand involuntarily seeking the pocket where the blotted letter lay. "How smoothly our performance progresses, does it not? and how capitally Miss Catheron plays Bella."

Lord Keith glanced across the stage at his betrothed, and his eyes assumed a tenderer look as they rested upon the beautiful face.

"She is a trifle nervous, I fancy—or shall I say a trifle mournful?" he said. "The removal of the ring seems to have impressed her somewhat sadly!"

"And thereby lent to her face and mien that which is making her performance such a decided success," responded Lady Blanche. "A mournful meekness is exactly suited to the character of Bella, and who knows but we may owe the success of the night to the very thing Miss Catheron deplores? But mercy! there is your cue, Lord Keith! Hurry! hurry! We mustn't have a stage wait for worlds. I do want this act to end nicely!"

His lordship bounded away as she spoke, and in another second was upon the stage.

In breathless delight she watched the progress of the scene between Beaufoy and Poyntz and Beau Farintosh; in rapturous excitement she heard the cue given for the schoolgirls to reappear; heard them singing the "home-going song"; saw them file across the stage; saw the climax approached, reached, passed! and then, with a little ecstatic scream, darted upon the stage, and forgetful of her supposed injury, began to clap her hands as the curtain fell, and the applause of an admiring audience told her that the first act had triumphantly ended.

"Excellent! excellent! excellent! I am proud of you all!" she gushed, as she fluttered about, embracing the ladies and shaking hands with the gentlemen. "Quick! all of you! Away to your rooms and change your dresses for the next act! Miss Catheron, go at once and put on a touch of color—you are too pale! Clear the stage, everybody, and give the carpenters an opportunity to change the scene. Lord Keith! Lord Keith! Stop a moment, I want you!"

In obedience to her former command every one of the

actors—his lordship included—had scurried away to change their costumes and leave the stage clear for the “grips” and property men to work; but catching the sound of her ladyship’s voice, Lord Keith stopped abruptly, and turning, walked toward her.

“What is it?” he said. “You called me, I think, Lady Blanche?”

“Yes,” she answered, almost breathless with excitement. “I want to employ my amanuensis again. You know the questions which are read by the visitors in the schoolroom scene? I had them all written out and pasted in a book, and now some stupid creature has taken the book away, and I am in despair. Won’t you please make a fresh copy for me? It won’t take you long to change your costume for the next act, and if you only hurry there will be plenty of time in which to rectify this stupid blunder!”

“Proteus himself couldn’t perform a change quicker than I shall make this one, then!” responded his lordship, laughingly; then, as he turned and hurried away: “Have everything ready for me, and I will be down in a twinkling,” he added.

And with a laugh that was almost hysterical with excitement, my lady thanked him, and darted away to superintend the setting of the next scene.

Never very slow in making his toilet, Lord Keith fairly jumped into his clothes this time—he knew from the rehearsals that the questions were many, and it would require at least ten minutes to copy them—and, even before Lady Blanche anticipated it, he was at her side again, dressed and ready for the second act.

“Oh, you haven’t given me the chance to get the writing materials yet!” she said, with mock despair, as she turned and saw him. “But never mind, there are plenty in the library, and you can go there without being seen by the audience. Here is the book; you will know where to find the questions. Run down that passage to the right, and it will lead you to the library without anybody seeing you. Quick! quick! We musn’t make the ‘wait’ too long, or we will tire our audience.”

For all answer, Lord Keith took the prompt-book from her hand, darted away in the direction of the right corridor, which led past the dressing-rooms of the gentlemen, and bounded in the direction of the library.

Waiting only to see him go, my lady hurried to the rear of the stage, where the properties for the schoolroom scene were lying, opened a desk, took out a blotter and a bottle of ink, and sliding into a corner where no one ob-

served her, gave the finishing touches to her clever little scheme.

Fishing the decoy letter from her pocket, she spread it open, poured some fresh ink upon the blot which covered the signature, allowed it to soak into the paper, and then ran the blotter across it.

"So large a blot would scarcely be thoroughly dry, if the letter were only just written," she murmured, as she refolded the written sheet and slipped it back into the envelope, and then carefully sealed it. "I am the granddaughter of 'Hulda, the Weasel,' Miss Inez Catheron, and it takes a shrewd person to catch a weasel asleep."

Holding the letter in her hand—for there was now no reason for concealing it—she fluttered out of her shadowy retreat, darted across the stage, and ran in the direction of the ladies' dressing-room.

Encountering one of the maids, who was hurrying down the passage with her arms full of feminine finery, my lady stopped the girl, and hastily thrust the letter into her hand.

"Take that note to Miss Catheron without an instant's delay," she said breathlessly. "It is from Lord Keith; he just gave it to me. Say that it is a matter of life and death. Go!"

The girl threw aside the armful of finery and darted away; and, waiting only to see her fly to Inez Catheron's room to give the letter into the hand of Martha Boggs—who opened the door in response to the maid's lusty knocking—my lady turned and fled back in the direction of the stage.

Sir Harry Charteris, dressed and ready for the second act, sauntered down and joined her; but my lady was in no mood for enjoying the chaff, or indulging in the faintest approach to a flirtation at present, for her nerves were at a fearful tension, her brain whirling, and her whole body trembling with nervous excitement.

She darted about—interfering with, more than assisting, the property men and stage hands, this time—she gave wrong orders, blundered in a dozen different ways, as she flew from pillar to post; called things by the wrong names, and ordered them to be set in wrong places, and her mind was in a state of positive torture when she looked up and caught sight of Inez Catheron hurrying across the stage and looking as pale as death.

"Hello! what the deuce is the matter?" exclaimed Sir Harry Charteris, as he, too, saw her. "Why, you're as white as a ghost, Miss Catheron! Are you ill?"

"No," she answered, nervously. "I—I am only surprised, worried. I have just received a most remarkable

message, and I fancy it is either a mistake or somebody is playing a cruel hoax, which—— Where is Lord Keith? Has anybody seen him?"

"Keith?" repeated Sir Harry, elevating his eyebrows.

"Yes, I've seen him!"

"When? Where? How?"

"Why, in the north corridor, a few minutes ago!" responded Sir Harry. "I saw him racing along there as though he was in no end of a hurry. I was just going across from my room to Sir Charles Enderby's at the time."

"Where did he go? Did you notice, Sir Harry?"

"Why, yes, he bolted into the library—I heard him shut the door!"

"The library!" repeated Inez, in a faint, sick voice, as though the mention of that place were a confirmation of her worst fears. "You are *sure* of that, Sir Harry?"

Lady Blanche, listening intently and suffering, meanwhile, all the tortures of the lost, strained her ears to catch the baronet's reply, but before she could do so—before even Sir Harry could frame it—a servant approached and bowed before her.

"If you please, my lady," he began, "Lord Keith told me to ask you if you'd step into the library for a minute. He just can't make that matter out!"

It was well for my lady that she stood apart from the others, and doubly well that a bungling stage-hand happened to overturn a desk at this juncture, and that the crash of its fall drowned to all ears save hers the words which followed the mention of his lordship's name, for softly as the servant had spoken, and briskly as she dismissed him, she realized in a glance that Miss Catheron had overheard, and, wheeling sharply, stepped toward her, just as the heiress looked up, and said, excitedly:

"What did Hurlbert say to you in regard to Lord Keith, Lady Blanche? Surely, I heard the mention of his name?"

"Yes," returned her ladyship, with glib sweetness; "I wonder what can be Lord Keith's motive? He has just sent and asked me to make this intermission as long as possible, and—— Good gracious! Miss Catheron, how you started. Are you ill? Ah! only a slight pain, was it? Indeed, I am very glad it is no worse. Pray find Lord Keith and beg him to hurry. See, the stage is almost set; as it is, the intermission has been quite long. But, pardon me, I *must* get the books for this scene. The tiresome things are in my own room."

Then, without further hesitation—for she feared lest her delay might bring Lord Keith hastening upon the scene—

she fluttered away, and ran breathlessly in the direction of the library.

"My Heaven! I must be careful—careful!" she panted. "Inez does not swallow the bait so easily as I had hoped; and, at all risks, at *any* cost, I must keep Lord Keith from leaving the library, and keep her from entering it. If she does not go to the east wicket in answer to the letter—and, worse than all, does not go quickly—I shall be ruined—ruined! Zillah will come down as soon as the orchestra ceases playing, and if Inez has not left the stage beforehand, the whole plot will be revealed and my vengeance defeated."

It was an awkward situation, certainly, and one not calculated to set my lady's mind at ease.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TANGLED WEB.

LADY BLANCHE, however, was not one to relinquish a hope while a ghost of a chance remained, and hastening breathlessly down the corridor, she reached the library door, opened it and fluttered in.

"Oh, it's you at last!" exclaimed Lord Keith. "Knowing how little time we have to spare, I was just about to go in search of you, Lady Blanche; I can't make these questions out. That is to say, some parts of the text are marked as 'cut out,' and then re-marked to be left in, and I can't for the life of me tell which sign to follow. See! I have copied the most of them, but these marked ones bother me."

My lady leaned over the desk where he sat and glanced at what he had written; now or never was her chance to detain him.

"Oh, dear me! You've got it *all* wrong!" she exclaimed with mock despair. "You have only written the cues and answers, and to be sure of no mistake being made I distinctly asked you to copy the whole page."

"Did you? Why, I am sure I didn't hear it, then."

"But I said it, nevertheless," with a smile that cost a terrible effort. "Here, take a fresh sheet of paper and begin again, and I'll stand by you to insure its being perfectly done this time."

"Phew! copy it all over again, do you say? But won't that make the wait terribly long?"

"Long or not, we can't help it," she answered. "Better a long wait than a blunder in the scene. Do begin, Lord Keith, and be sure you write it as clearly as possible."

Thus admonished his lordship took a fresh sheet of

paper, began the work anew, and for the next ten minutes nothing was heard but the scratch, scratch, scratch of his pen.

In a state of terrible excitement—for she knew that the orchestra had ceased playing by this time, and the success or failure of her plans was now thoroughly established, Lady Blanche paced the floor during the last five minutes of the writing, and but for the scratching of his pen, absorbed though he was in the work, Lord Keith must have heard her gritting her teeth under the strain of the mental torture she endured.

But the end came at length, and, tossing aside his pen, he sprung to his feet.

"Victoria! The deed is done!" he laughed. "Now then for a book to stick it in, and away we'll fly back to the stage."

He darted to one of the bookcases as he spoke, selected a volume, then, pinning the written sheet between the leaves, he closed it with a snap, and whirled open the library door.

"By George, the music has stopped, and the audience must be growing impatient!" he exclaimed. "The curtain has been down at least fifteen minutes. Come along, Lady Blanche. We haven't an instant to lose."

"Ring up the curtain for me—I'll be there as quickly as possible!" she responded, in a strident voice.

Lord Keith darted away in the direction of the stage.

"Success or failure—success or failure!" gasped her ladyship, huskily, as she moved falteringly after him. "I have crossed the Rubicon, but have I won or lost, I wonder?"

Slowly and with uncertain steps—for her strength seemed to forsake her under the strain of this dreadful ordeal, which was to make or mar the structure of her vengeance—she slunk along the now deserted passage, and, like a wounded snake, crawled feebly onward to the touchstone of her fate.

Midway in the corridor she suddenly stopped short, and, laying one hand over her heart, leaned back against the wall, sick and faint with terror; for the distant tinkling of a bell told her that the curtain had risen, and the second act of "School" had begun.

The second act was moving along as smoothly as the first had done when she reached the stage, and, gliding to the wing, she flashed a nervous glance at the actors.

They were all "on the boards" at the time, for the schoolroom scene was in progress—and that calls for the presence of every character in the play—and glancing along the rows of desks where the "sweet girl graduates"

sat in bright array, my lady's eye flashed to the place assigned to Bella, saw that it was filled, and then, as though fascinated, she stood and stared at the drooping face of its occupant—the face of Inez Catheron, or Zillah, the gypsy—which?

“My Heaven! I cannot tell—I cannot tell!” she groaned, in impotent despair. “Which am I facing—success or failure? Which am I looking at—the heiress or the out-cast? The answer is here before me at this moment, and yet I cannot read it!”

Breathless and trembling with excitement, she leaned forward and watched the progress of the play, and from that moment until she knew to a certainty whether she had failed or succeeded, her eyes never left the face of the girl who was playing the *role* of Bella.

Not yet had she been called upon to speak—and from experience, my lady knew that both voices were so wonderfully alike she could discover nothing *that way*; but now the examination scene was beginning. Already Beau Farintosh was opening the book which Dr. Sutcliffe had handed him for the purpose of questioning the scholars, and as though she hoped, somehow, to detect a clew which would reveal the truth to her, my lady's agitation increased, and her bright eyes watched that fair, girlish face as though its beauty fascinated her.

One by one the questions were given out, and one by one the scholars answered, until with a start of nervous interest, my lady heard the speech whose end was Bella's cue, and forgetting to breathe in her excitement, stood like a figure of marble, and waited for the end.

It came—it passed—and Bella arose to answer.

For one second she seemed to falter, seemed to be struggling to find her voice; her eyes dilated with a look of fear as they lifted and she saw the audience; her lips quivered; her face grew visibly paler; she spoke, and at the sound of her own voice, started as though it were something strange and new to her, and long before the speech was ended and the speaker took her seat, my lady knew the truth.

That brief attack of “stage-fright” had revealed it to her; she knew to a certainty that the girl who spoke those lines had never faced the footlights, nor lifted her voice in public before that very minute, and in the furious joy which swept across her soul then, my lady could almost have shrieked aloud.

“I win—I win! It is Zillah!” she panted, as she sunk into a chair and turned her face from the stage, so that none might read the barbaric joy which she *knew* must be written there. “The scheme has worked, the change

has been made, and now—Keith, your heart is under my heel.”

So, in a moment, my lady's mood changed, and she became the butterfly again.

She had seen all eyes turn upon Zillah when she blundered—after Inez had been so calm and self-possessed—but she knew, also, that the brief attack of stage-fright would be entirely overcome by the time she must speak again, and in that knowledge lost the last fear for the success of her revenge.

When next the cue was given for Bella to speak, all eyes were directed to her as before; but this time there was no faltering—this time her voice obeyed her, and it was the voice of Inez Catheron to the life.

When the curtain fell upon the second act, my lady rushed to her with a little coo of delight.

“My dear Miss Catheron, I shall not put you to such hard measures one moment longer,” she cried. “You are nervous over the removal of that ring, and it is simply cruel to torture you so. Never mind whether it is incongruous or not, Lord Keith—her nervous fit in this past act has taught me how she suffers, the superstitious little pagan, and she shall wear it in spite of everything. Put it back upon her finger, and let her keep it there to the end.”

“With all my heart,” he answered, as he took the jewel from his pocket and slipped it upon her hand; then, in a lower voice: “Are you happy, Inez,” he added, “now that the pledge of my love for you is given never to be recalled from you, even in play?”

“Doubly happy!” she answered, in a whisper that thrilled him with rapture. “So happy, Alaric, I could almost cry!”

“Clear the stage—clear the stage!” broke in Lady Blanche, laughingly, as she gave them a playful push, “and please, happy people, don't rehearse the ‘milk jug scene’ at present. Miss Catheron, you didn't obey my injunction to put on some rouge, for you are as pale as a lily even yet.”

“I forgot it,” responded Zillah, with a laugh. “And besides, I'm afraid I don't know how to do it properly. It's an art of which I have no knowledge, dear Lady Blanche.”

“But an art which is absolutely requisite when one has to face the footlights, my dear!” returned her ladyship, gayly; “so, to be certain that you *won't* ‘forget it’ again, I shall take the liberty of accompanying you to your dressing-room and of doing the ‘painting’ myself.”

Then, with a parting word to Lord Keith, she led her

dupe away, ostensibly for the purpose mentioned, but really for the simple sake of showing her *where* to go, and of whispering a few words of caution and advice as they went.

"Oh, you done that act just too sweet for anything, Miss Inez!" exclaimed, rapturously, old Martha Boggs, as Zillah and Lady Blanche entered Miss Catheron's dressing-room. "But when in the world did you come back? I kept watchin' and a-watchin' arter I seen you leave Sir Harry Charteris and rush off like you was took mad, but I never seen you come *back*, and the first thing I knowed there you was, a-standin' on t'other side o' the stage a-read-in' over your part!"

Zillah laughed softly, but offered no explanation, and having applied a morsel of rouge to the girl's soft cheeks, my lady kissed her with seeming tenderness, and then fluttered away.

"Which," admitted Martha Boggs, when she told the housekeeper of it afterward, "struck me all of a heap with astonishment, for how them two came to be so thick, all on a pop, clean beat me out, Miss Flicker, I do assure you!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SECOND ENDING OF THE TRAGEDY.

THE success of the private theatricals was beyond all question, and it furnished the country with food for conversation for many a day afterward.

The curtain fell on the final act amid the heartiest applause, the actors congratulated one another, and tendered Lady Blanche a vote of thanks for her valuable assistance, "without which," volunteered Sir Charles Enderby, "we'd all have made a fearful muddle of it, especially Charty, he's such an awful muff!"

My lady accepted the honors heaped upon her with her accustomed sweetness, flattered each member of the cast in the most delicate and satisfying way, then the stage was abandoned, the schoolgirl costumes were exchanged for ball dresses, the gentlemen's frock coats and cutaways for "claw-hammers" and the necessary adjuncts, and then the dancing began.

This meeting and mixing with Inez Catheron's many friends and acquaintances was the most trying part of Zillah's experience, but Lady Blanche kept close to her side—ever ready to prompt her—and between this valuable assistance and a plea that she was too much fatigued by the performance to enter into the festivities to any great extent, she managed to pass through the ordeal of

the night, and people who might otherwise have been offended by her disinclination to enter into any extended conversation, or might have remarked her apparent uneasiness, attributed everything to the cause assigned, and thought the result "quite natural."

Her growing fondness for Lady Blanche's society proved a source of satisfaction to the old earl, and he found an opportunity to tell her so before the night ended.

"You see, my darling, you misjudged her!" he said. "Think how tirelessly she has worked for the success of our entertainment, and how much we owe her! Your Aunt Alicia is positively infatuated with her!"

"Aunt Alicia is not alone in that, grandpapa!" returned Zillah, laughingly. "Shall I confess it? Lady Blanche's perennial good nature, her kindness to me, and her unselfishness throughout the entire affair has quite won my heart, and I am willing to confess that I *did* misjudge her. Alaric says that she is the noblest of women, and that, all reports to the contrary, we really owe the whole success of the play to her tireless work and persistent endeavor."

"Alaric is a sensible fellow, my dear," responded the old earl, warmly. "Lady Blanche is really a charming and noble woman, and I am pleased that your eyes have at length been opened to it!"

"Not alone my eyes, grandpapa, but my heart and—my conscience!"

"Your conscience, dear? Why, what do you mean by that?"

"Nothing, only that I am sorry I misjudged her, and I want to do something to atone for it. I have formed a plan, but I don't know how you will like it. I want to ask Lady Blanche to stay here—to live with us for a year or two. Would you object to that?"

"Egad! but you're a young lady of extremes; eh, Keith?" laughed the old earl. "Talk about rushing an acquaintance, here's an example, if you like. Why, only a fortnight ago you were sorry she ever came here, and now you want to keep her 'for a year or two!'"

"But you will let me do so, will you not, grandpapa?"

"Let you? Well, you've always done as you pleased, for one thing, my dear, and for the other, I should be delighted if she were to stay here forever!" responded Lord Glandore. "Now that you've got your precious Alaric, I begin to see that I'm to expect only a few odd moments of your society; and as Lady Blanche is a host in herself, I say, by all means keep her."

"And you, Alaric?"

"My darling, I have no will but yours!" he answered,

with a smile. "I respect and admire her ladyship, and although I have reason to believe that somebody else will be liable to take her away from us in the near future, if it please you to ask her to remain with us forever, it will please me also, Inez."

So the matter was settled; my lady was invited to remain at the Court, and the invitation was sweetly accepted.

In the meantime, she watched and waited, and made frequent journeys to the east wicket, in quest of a certain signal which she was anxious to see; for although the gypsies folded up their tents and left Bracken Hollow two days after the supposed "recalling" of the Spirit Child, as yet no news had reached her regarding the further movements of her father, and the certainty of Inez Catheron's incarceration in a madhouse was only a matter of speculation.

It was not until a week after the heiress had disappeared that my lady found the signal she awaited, and knew that her father had returned, and would be at the old place of meeting that night.

When all the household was wrapped in sleep she stole out to the Oak Walk and met him under the trees, and all that she desired to know was told to her then and there.

The scheme had worked to perfection.

Miss Catheron had been seized and drugged the moment she appeared at the wicket in response to the decoy letter, and in this condition she had been borne to a French madhouse, as originally planned, and was even then the inmate of a maniac's cell.

"The man who keeps it is a human beast—a rascal who has less conscience than a tiger, and less mercy than a snake!" explained Marco. "He knows nothing of her name and station, and never asked for information regarding either. So long as the money is forthcoming, he agrees to keep her under bolt and bar, and even hinted that should there come a time when we want her silenced forever, a good round sum will purchase his services for the perpetration of the deed."

My lady listened intently to the entire recital, and, when it was concluded, drew her father aside and began to detail her plans for the future progress of their dark work.

It was late when she left him and crept back into the house. Unseen she had left it, unseen she returned, and only God and they two knew what had been plotted between Marco and his daughter under the trees of the Oak Walk.

The beautiful summer days drifted rapidly along, and August came around at last.

Life to Zillah had been a dream of delight since the hour she crossed the threshold of Glandore Court, and believing what my lady had told her—that Inez Catheron had long since fallen a victim to gypsy vengeance, and that, as she had saved Lord Keith from a like fate, and, wronging no one, only blessed herself and him by the fraud she had perpetrated—gave herself up to the blissful possibilities of the future, and measured time from the day when she should be his wife.

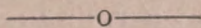
So the days rolled on, and the preparations for the wedding continued.

The tenth of August came around at last, and, to the joy of all concerned, it was truly a perfect day.

In white satin splendor, and virginal orange blossoms, Zillah was driven away to the church at Leith in company with Lord Glandore and the Countess of Elsdale; and while the bells were ringing through the sunshiny splendor of the summer morning, and the Glandore tenantry cheered itself hoarse, the second act of a tragedy was begun and ended.

Happy with a lover's greatest happiness, Lord Keith received his bride from the hands of the old earl.

In joy he took, in reverence he swore to hold the woman who entered that church as Zillah, the gypsy, but who left it what her husband had made her—Lady Inez Keith, the heiress of Glandore.



PART THIRD.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW THE NEW LIFE OPENED.

“AND this is Paris, Alaric?”

“This is Paris—yes, my darling!” smiled Lord Keith, as he walked over to his wife's side, and, brushing back the curtains of the window where she stood, looked down with her upon the teeming boulevards of the gay French capital, over which the crisp sunshine of the October morning lay like a golden mist. “But why do you lay so much stress upon the word ‘this,’ Inez? One would think that the sight astonished you.”

“It does,” she answered, lifting her innocent eyes to his and smiling up into his adoring face. “I have never

seen so much bustle and confusion anywhere. It is so different from the other cities we have visited, and so very, very different from London. Everything here is so clean, and everybody seems so happy. Oh, I am sure I shall like this place best of all. Shall we stay here long?"

"Until it wearies *you*, my darling!" he answered, as he drew her closer to his side, and bending, kissed her hair. "It is only your pleasure I study, sweet, and so long as it pleases you to remain here we will defer our return to Glandore Court. Lady Blanche will probably join us before noon, and, since we are so close to England, it would not surprise me if your grandfather were to accompany her."

"Oh, I shall be so glad!" responded Zillah, her face brightening anew. "I really long to see Blanche, and I know we shall have such happy times when she joins us, for she, too, is very fond of Paris. When we arrived here last night, I did not think I should like it; but this morning I am quite charmed with the place!"

Lord Keith laughed a rollicking, happy laugh, and tightened the clasp of the arm which he had wound about her waist.

"You precious little nondescript, how oddly you talk, to be sure!" he said gayly. "To hear you, one would think that you had never set eyes upon Paris before."

"Nor have I," she answered artlessly. "It is true, we passed through it the day after we were married, but one sees so little of a city from the windows of a railway coach, that it can hardly be called seeing it at all, Alaric."

Lord Keith glanced at her, and a thoughtful ridge gathered between his brows.

"You are in one of your mystifying moods again, Inez," he said. "I was not alluding to the time we passed through Paris at the beginning of our bridal tour. I was thinking of the time you sojourned here. Lord Glandore told me that you spent two years in the Convent of the Sacred Heart finishing your education, for one thing, and in addition——"

A sudden pallor swept across Zillah's face as she realized the blunder which she had committed, and before her husband could complete his remarks, she made a hasty interposition.

"Yes, I was in a convent here," she said nervously, "but one sees even less of a city from behind the walls of a convent than from the windows of a railway coach, Alaric. But do look at that queerly-dressed man opposite. He must be a foreigner, I think."

Lord Keith glanced in the direction indicated, saw the

stranger, made some remark in reference to him, and as that gave the conversation another turn, the allusion which he had meant to make relative to a certain time when Inez Catheron and Lady Elsdale had spent two months in Paris, slipped his mind, and was not recalled.

It was not the first, nor yet the second of these small errors which Zillah had committed in the ten sweet weeks of their wedded life, for many a time her innocent delight had betrayed her into some thoughtless word or act which puzzled her husband, but she had always managed to turn his attention from the subject—just as she turned it now—the very instant she realized that an error had been committed, and, warned by that, was careful afterward not to approach the same subject.

But these errors had been the only speck in the sky of her happiness, and even they were so slight that, while they mystified Lord Keith, and terrified her for the instant, they left no shadow to mar the perfect sunshine of their wedded bliss.

If there had been one weak spot in her love for Alaric Keith, his devotion, his tender thoughtfulness, and his constant study to please her slightest fancy must have strengthened it; but as it had been a "perfect structure, Heaven builded," from the very first, this new, sweet happiness could do no more than show her how fast her soul was bound to his and how empty the world would be without him.

She was thinking of it even now as they stood there in the window of the hotel and looked down upon the sunshiny boulevard and talked of the passing throng, and a faint low sigh escaped her as she let her head droop until it rested upon his shoulder.

"Hello, I say! sighing already, Lady Keith?" he laughed good humoredly. "I'm aware that it's the general rule for people to sober down after they're married and take a matter-of-fact view of life in general, but aren't you rushing it a little? Only married ten weeks yesterday, and here you are sighing already? Sick of your bargain so soon, my lady?"

"No, she answered with a smile. "That is a sickness I am sure will never claim me for a victim, Alaric—I think I love you too much for that. As for the sigh—I was only thinking, that's all!"

"Thinking, my darling? Thinking of what?"

"Of our honeymoon," she murmured softly. "It has been so happy, Alaric, that I hate to see it go. But—" this with another sigh—"time will not stand still even for a woman so blessed by Heaven as I, so I must be con-

tent to face the inevitable whether it pleases me or not. Our honeymoon will end here!"

"No, our bridal tour—not our honeymoon," he answered as he kissed her. "*That* will last all the days of our lives, Inez. Such love as ours will defy the ravages of time, I am sure, and we shall be lovers—*married* lovers, if you will—to the day when death divides us, as only death can!"

"You are sure of it, Alaric?"—with rapturous eagerness—"your feel no change in your affection for the woman you have wooed?"

"Only what I have told you—a deeper, stronger, holier love for the woman I have won!" he answered with a smile. "Why, my darling, what new phase is this? You are weeping, Inez?"

"But only tears of happiness, Alaric!" she murmured, tenderly. "After all I have done well, my husband—for your sake and for mine."

"Principally mine I should imagine," he responded, jokingly. "But now if it please you, Lady Keith, will you kindly recollect that it is half-past ten, and if you really mean to enjoy a morning ride, you had better give yourself into the hands of the illustrious Martha Boggs, and get dressed as speedily as possible, or the carriage will be ready before you are. We'll just take a spin around the boulevards and be here to greet Lady Blanche at noon, and after that, provided her ladyship feels equal to the exertion, we'll all pay a visit to the *Salon* Exhibition and have a peep at the pictures. The *salon* only opened two days ago, but the clerk of the hotel told me last night that it is the best exhibit the society has made for years. One particular picture, according to *his* story, has made a decided hit, and will in itself, repay us for a visit. It is the work of an American artist whose name was unknown to fame until he produced this painting, and it is called—let—me—see now. *What* the dickens is it? Something about trees or flowers, or— Oh, yes! I recollect now. 'The Flower of the Forest,' that's the name of it. The clerk hasn't seen it himself, but he says that everybody is talking about it, and people are fairly flocking to the *salon* to view it. Should you like to go too?"

"Oh, very much indeed, Alaric."

"Very well, then, if Lady Blanche isn't too tired after her long journey, we'll drop into the *salon* this afternoon, and then, if she is able to stand an additional strain, I'll see if we can't get a box for the opera this evening. Now, then, give me a kiss before we both go into retirement for the purpose of arraying ourselves like Solomon in all his glory."

Then, taking her in his arms, he kissed her, not once, but half a dozen times, and then stalked off to his dressing-room to give himself into the hands of his valet.

For a moment Zillah lingered in the pretty, quiet breakfast-room of the suit, then she touched the bell as a signal for the *garçon* to enter and remove the remnants of their morning meal; and, humming softly to herself, fluttered away to dress for the drive.

Half an hour later the carriage was announced. Lord Keith led her down and assisted her into it; and even as he did so he could not but notice how the by-standers stared at her, and how, throughout the morning drive, pedestrians on the pavement and people in passing carriages turned around and regarded his wife as though she were an object of national interest.

It was not an entirely new experience, for Zillah's unusual beauty had excited comments in every place they had visited, but it had never been so pronounced as this; and, after awhile, as they bowled along through the bright, morning sunshine, it became so frequent and so annoying that she was obliged to lower her veil to escape observation from the crowd.

"Talk about French politeness! I'm blessed if this isn't a glorious example of French insolence!" muttered Lord Keith, angrily. "If you remain in Paris another day, these impertinent beggars will stare you out of countenance, Inez."

"They are very rude, certainly," she answered, in a tone of annoyance. "I dislike to wear a veil over my face, but it seems to me the only way of escaping notice; and if people will only cease staring at me *now*, I shall be satisfied, Alaric."

People *did* cease, of course, as soon as she veiled her face, but it spoiled her enjoyment to be obliged to keep herself muffled up all the time, and she was not sorry when the horses' heads were again turned in the direction of the hotel.

But whatever annoyance she had undergone, it was all forgotten, when, upon returning at noon, she found Lady Blanche Hay awaiting her.

"My darling, darling girl! how well you are looking, to be sure," twittered her ladyship after she had kissed and embraced her half a dozen times. "And you, too, Lord Keith. Positively I never saw you looking better in my life! What is that you say? Lord Glandore? Oh, no; he didn't accompany me. He had intended to do so, but yesterday morning his old enemy, the gout, made him an unexpected visit, which, while not severe, was at least

enough to prevent him making the journey, so I was obliged to come alone!"

Both Zillah and Lord Keith expressed their sorrow over the old earl's misfortune and disappointment; then the subject was dropped; they fell to chatting in a desultory way, and presently dinner was announced.

Lady Blanche dined with the young couple at their private table, and, to the delight of both, announced herself not only willing but happy to join them in their visit to the *salon* and their box at the opera.

"Very well, then, if you will excuse me, ladies, I will dispatch a messenger to secure the box and also order the carriage prepared," announced his lordship as he arose from the table; then, having questioned them regarding the time at which they would prefer to start for the *salon*, he stalked out of the room and left them.

Once alone with her dupe, Lady Blanche arose, and, taking her in her arms, smiled down into her beautiful flushing face.

"Well, did I advise you illy, Zillah?" she said, in her sweetest voice. "I need not ask if you are happy, for I read it in your eyes, my dear. You have married the man you love, my dear, and all is told in that!"

"No, not *all*, for you have forgotten to add that *he* loves *me*, Blanche," responded Zillah, in a voice of rapture. "I know not why, but I have dreaded that his heart would detect the difference even though his eye failed to do so, but now all doubt is dead, and my life has become perfect. Only to-day he told me that his wife was dearer to him than his sweetheart, and that he loved *me* better than the woman he had asked to be his wife. My life is perfect, Blanche, perfect! It wants nothing to crown it now—not even the sweetest and the holiest tie that can unite a man and his wife throughout the years to come!"

Then dropping her blushing face upon my lady's bosom, she wept such tears as only they can shed whose lives are too happy, and whose hearts are too full for laughter.

Ten minutes later, when my lady left her and went to her own apartments to dress for their visit to the *salon*, she stopped on her way past Lord Keith's door and laughed at it as though it heard and understood.

"Born of a gypsy mother!" she said, with a sleek, soft laugh. "How proud you will be of the child, Keith, when I have branded its mother as a vagabond and an outcast! The bond that unites, she calls it; but in the days to come she will live to know it what I know it now—the blow that divides—the curse that crushes, and the bond that horrifies. Oh, my lord! my lord! what a fool you made of yourself that night at Carn Ruth! Marco is

here—Marco and some one else—you poor, unsuspecting dupe, and the curtain is ready to go up in the third act of the tragedy the moment I raise my hand. A vagabond gypsy for your wife—a vagabond gypsy for the mother of your child! Was it worth while, Keith, to make an enemy of me?"

Then, with another purring, catlike laugh, she hurried onward, and swiftly disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOW CHANCE HELPED MY LADY.

It was striking two o'clock when a servant came up and announced that "the carriage awaited my lord's pleasure," and as "milor" and the ladies had long been ready and were only chatting in the private parlor for the sake of killing time, they arose instantly, donned their hats and outer garments, and hurried down to the waiting vehicle.

Profiting by the morning's experience, and not wishing to subject his bride to a repetition of what he termed "the staring nuisance," Lord Keith had secured a closed vehicle this time, and as a result, beyond the few who stopped in the lobby of the hotel and looked after her as she passed out to the carriage, Zillah escaped the annoyance which had marred her morning's ride.

But once arrived at the Paris Salon, it was evident that she must again endure the annoyance, for her appearance excited a genuine commotion.

The long rooms of the society were packed by an ever-increasing crowd; but, as Lady Keith moved from picture to picture, people kept following her with their eyes, the ruder ones nudged one another and began to whisper, the better bred made way for her and silently stared, until she found herself in the embarrassing situation of a woman upon whom four-fifths of the entire gathering stared as though she were a curiosity.

"Confound the impertinent crew! What has come over them, I wonder?" said Lord Keith with annoyance. "It's no use trying to see anything here with any degree of comfort, Inez, so we'll just take a peep at the American's picture, and then be off again. Here's one of the attendants—I'll ask him to direct us where to find it. Pardon me, my man"—this in French, of course—"but can you direct me where to find——"

"It is there, m'sieur!" interrupted the attendant, not waiting for his lordship to cease speaking, and at the same time pointing to the end of the gallery, where some

fifty or sixty people were assembled with their faces to the wall.

"It is there?" repeated Lord Keith, in a puzzled tone. "What are you driving at? You haven't given me a chance to tell you what I wish to see yet. What's there?"

"*'La Fleur de Foret,' m'sieur,*" returned the attendant, politely. "That is the picture m'sieur wishes to find, is it not? *Voilà, it is there!*"

"Thanks!" returned his lordship, mystified by this response; then, in English, as he rejoined his party: "Blest if I can understand all this," he added. "First they stare you out of all countenance, Inez, and then they get a knack of reading my thoughts and answering questions before I ask them."

"They are certainly acting very queerly," interpolated Lady Blanche. "It is the strangest thing I ever witnessed. Wherever we go, they all stop and stare at us. Look! somebody has told them that we are coming to view the '*Flower of the Forest,*' and now every soul before it has turned to stare at *us!*"

This was strictly true; for, as if by some peculiar system of telegraphy, the group about the famous picture had been informed of her approach; every man, woman, and child faced about and stared at Zillah as though she were a ghost.

In silence my lord and the two ladies moved forward, in silence the crowd stared; then, as if by tacit consent, the people fell back, making an avenue to the famous picture, and determined to profit by this odd performance and get to the front where they could view the painting. Lord Keith spoke a few words to his wife and Lady Blanche, stalked down the avenue provided for their approach, lifted his eyes to the picture, and then stopped short and stared at it.

A gypsy encampment under the forest trees—that was what he saw—the whole background agleam with the light of a full moon that struggled through a rack of clouds, and slanted its beams along the boles of the trees and the clusters of tents.

In the foreground a knot of gypsies was grouped about the prostrate figure of a man—an artist, evidently, for his portfolio lay beside him, and his color-box hung by a leathern strap that passed across his shoulder. He lay at the foot of an embankment, his bloodstained head falling over on the arm of a burly gypsy who knelt beside him in the act of pressing a tin cup to his lips, the moonlight slanting across his pale, handsome face, and his eyes fixed not upon the cup nor the man who proffered it, but on the

figure of a girl, who stood just beyond. Her dress proclaimed her to be a gypsy, even as the attitude of the man who stood beside her endeavoring to draw her back from the sight of the injured artist, proclaimed her to be a member of the same tribe. But what made the picture difficult of comprehension, was the fact that she held in her hand a small black mask, which she had either just removed from, or was just about to adjust to her face.

And that face—my lord started as he saw it, and the blood rushed angrily up and reddened his own—that face, in every line and every curve, was an exact reproduction of his wife's.

He turned and looked at her.

She was standing there and staring at the picture as though it fascinated her; her lips were compressed, her great, terror-filled eyes were dilated, her face was ashen gray, and she was breathing hard like a hunted roe.

My lady, too, was staring at the picture, bewildered and astonished by this unexpected *contretemps*, and but too plainly showing that her surprise was real, and she, too, had been ignorant of what the picture would reveal.

The crowd had now closed in about the astonished trio, and my lord's angry eye detected the fact that every member of it was staring at his wife. But she, poor child, seemed not to realize it—the picture either fascinated or stupefied her, for she could only stand and stare at it with that look of mute despair.

My lord moved briskly to her side and touched her arm.

"It is shameful—it is outrageous!" he said through his shut teeth. "The rascal who has painted it has managed to obtain a portrait of you somehow, and has dared to put your features upon a vagabond gypsy. But if his idea is to force us into buying the picture, I'll horsewhip him until he crawls to your feet and asks——"

"Don't!" she cried out, suddenly whirling as she spoke, and lifting two startled eyes to his angry face. "Don't touch him, don't bring him near me, Alaric. It will be better to hush it up before—before it gets into the papers and becomes notorious. Buy the picture—buy the picture and have it destroyed. I—I don't care what it costs. I want that picture, Alaric, and—and I want to go home—oh, I want to go home!"

He saw that she had been overcome by the shock, and drawing her hand through his arm, turned from the picture and led her away, the angry color still flushing his face, and the angry light still glowing in his eyes.

At the bottom of the staircase he released her and turned to Lady Blanche.

"Assist her to the hotel, if you will be so kind, Lady Blanche," he said, huskily. "I'll call the carriage, but I can't go home with you now, Inez. I must see that man, that painter, before an hour's delay and know what the rascal means by taking such a liberty with the likeness of my wife!"

"Oh, don't tell him that, Alaric—don't tell him that the picture is like *me*!" she panted excitedly.

"Decidedly I shall not, Inez," he answered. "If the rascal's idea is blackmail, I shall give him no clew to your identity, my dear; I'll be more apt to give him a cowhiding than anything else, confound him. But here's the carriage. Step in now, my darling, and get back to the hotel as quickly as possible. I can't tell you when to expect me, dear, but I won't come home until I know that artist's game."

"Tell him your wife has taken a fancy to it, Alaric," she responded faintly. "Buy it, no matter what it costs. I want that picture destroyed."

"My darling, don't take it so much to heart, or you'll make me want to throttle him for his audacity!" exclaimed Lord Keith, as he assisted her into the carriage. "I know it's a villainous piece of business to have your face attached to such an affair as that, and to be made notorious as an artist's model; but don't fret yourself to death over it, sweet. The man who portrayed my wife as a vagabond gypsy shall either remedy the picture or answer to her husband!"

Then closing the carriage door with a smart smack, he signaled the driver to move on, and a moment later the vehicle was bowling homeward through the sunshine of the October afternoon.

Once out of sight and sound of her husband, all Zillah's feeble strength seemed to desert her, and with a faint, wailing cry she dropped her head upon Lady Blanche's shoulder and burst into stormy tears.

"Oh, why did we ever come to Paris?" she cried out in a voice of agony and terror. "Why has that night come back from the past to haunt me?"

"It happened, then?" exclaimed her ladyship, excitedly. "Do you know who painted the picture?"

"No!" responded Zillah, in a voice of despair. "I can't tell who painted it, but—but it all happened just as you saw it there. The artist must have become possessed of one of Miss Catheron's pictures, and my sin has come back upon me through the likeness which has given me so much. When she lived I cheated her of her lover, and dead she

comes back to rob me of my husband's love; I feel it, I know it now. I have done a wrong, Blanche, and some way I shall be made to atone for it!"

Lady Blanche made no response. Fate or fortune had seen fit to aid her in a most miraculous way, and the smile which flickered about her lips told how grateful she was for the assistance.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"CRISS-CROSS, THE LINES RUN."

LORD KEITH stood upon the pavement and watched the retreating carriage until it was lost among the other vehicles that filled the crowded street, then with an abrupt movement, he faced about and stalked back to the *salon*.

In the upper corridor he stopped suddenly, and taking his catalogue from the pocket into which he had thrust it when he led his wife away, he ran his eye down the list of pictures in quest of the name he sought.

He came upon it at the bottom of the third page.

"196—"La Fleur de Foret," par Mr. Robert Herndon."

"Robert Herndon, eh?" repeated his lordship, as he refolded the catalogue and thrust it back into his pocket. "Well, Mr. Robert Herndon, I shall take the pains to find out where you hide your rascally head, and then to discover what may be your little game. Hello! there's an attendant. I'll step in and question him. Hi! stop a bit. I want a word with you, my man. I want to see Mr. Herndon in reference to purchasing a picture. Can you direct me where to find his atelier?"

"I will make inquiries, monsieur, if you will have the goodness to remain here a moment," responded the attendant; then with a courteous bow he walked away and disappeared into the office of the directors.

In less than five minutes he reappeared and proffered his lordship a small slip of pasteboard.

"Monsieur will find the address there," he said, politely. "But I am requested to state that it is doubtful if Mr. Herndon still remains in Paris. He notified the directors to that effect this morning."

"Never mind, I'll risk it!" returned his lordship, resolutely; then, as he glanced at the card and hurried out: "'No. 27 Rue des Angles,' eh?" he added. "You're a pretty specimen to put in 'angel's' quarters, you pettifogging scoundrel, and I'll rout you out of them in blessed quick time, but what I'll know what you mean by this piece of impertinence!"

Then hailing a passing fiacre, he leaped in, gave the

driver his directions, and was rattled away to the Rue des Anges.

It was striking four o'clock when the man came to a halt before No. 27, and springing down, Lord Keith found himself standing in front of one of a row of small two-story frame buildings, all so exactly alike that they looked as though they had been turned out of a mold.

Pushing open the gate of the trim wooden paling which inclosed the small square courtyard, his lordship stalked up the graveled walk, up the low wooden steps and rang for admittance.

The door swung open, and there on the threshold stood the artist himself, and my lord looking up found his eye resting upon six feet of the manliest and most handsome type of manhood he had ever seen.

Broad of shoulder, and powerful of limb, his dark hair cropped close, a superb mustache shading his handsome mouth, and his blue eyes looking frankly out of a frank, honest face, my lord saw a man distinctly American, and above all, a gentleman.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Herndon in a full rich voice, and with an air that betokened breeding. "I beg your pardon, but may I ask the nature of your business, sir?"

"I wish to see Mr. Robert Herndon," responded his lordship. "They told me at the *salon* that I might not be fortunate enough to find him at home, but am I wrong in inferring that he stands before me?"

"You are quite correct, sir, I am Robert Herndon," was the quiet response. "I have but little time to accord you, sir, for I'm in haste to start for Fontainebleau—indeed, but for a trifling delay which caused me to miss the train, I should have left two hours ago—but if you will step in, Lord Keith, I shall be pleased to give you all the time I can possibly spare."

"You know me, then?" exclaimed his lordship, in surprise, as he crossed the threshold and followed Herndon into a small, neatly kept sitting-room.

"I know you—yes," was the smiling yet dignified response. "I have a good memory for faces, and yours was pointed out to me one day at Carn Ruth some two years ago. Pardon me if I do not offer you any refreshments, sir, but we keep no servants, my mother and I; and as she is sleeping at present, and I in too much haste to spare the time to do a servant's duty at present, you will, I am sure, overlook the omission."

"Oh, do not let that bother you in the least," returned Lord Keith, his feelings warming, in spite of himself, to this handsome, manly fellow, who neither shrunk from

confessing his poverty nor showed any disposition to avoid the plain, unvarnished truth. "I shall not detain you long, Mr. Herndon. I merely called to speak with you in regard to your now famous picture, and to ask a few questions in regard to it. I believe that you will be frank enough with me to confess the truth and tell me who was the original of your gypsy maiden, and how you came to give her that face. I have a reason for asking it, Mr. Herndon—a reason which, since I have seen you, I believe you would respect if you knew the truth. Will you generously tell me whom you took for your model?"

Herndon's frank eyes never fell.

"I will tell you, yes, Lord Keith," he answered. "I took for my model the one woman I shall ever love, the one woman for whom I shall always seek, and whose face I saw only as you see it in the painting."

Lord Keith started and glared sharply upward.

"I do not comprehend your words, sir," he said, in surprise. "Do you mean that you saw a woman with that pure, high-bred face, and who was a *gypsy*?"

"I mean that—yes, Lord Keith. As you see her in the picture, so I saw her in the realization of it. The whole scene is painted from memory, and reproduced just as it actually happened. I have altered it in but one point. The face of the injured artist should have been my own, but for reasons that must be obvious to you I refrained from producing it.

"I do not know the original of the gypsy maiden. I saw her but that once, Lord Keith; but if you believe in destiny, you will say with me that I saw her never to forget her, nor yet to find another who will fill the place made vacant by her in that one night.

"It happened while I was on a sketching tour in Wales, two years ago, and something like a fortnight after I saw you. Belated and overtaken by the darkness, I lost my way and stumbled down an embankment. The force of the blow rendered me insensible, and from the moment of my fall I knew no more until I opened my eyes upon the original of the picture you have seen.

"Only for a moment did I see that girl's face, but the memory of that moment will cling to me all the days of my life. Why she should be masked, or why the people of her tribe should be so anxious to get her out of my sight I know no more than you. All I saw you have seen in that picture. It was only a momentary glance, but I thought then, as I think now, and as I will continue to think to the day of my death, that I looked upon the loveliest of human faces, and looked to love it all my life long.

"Unfortunately for me, I swooned again almost on the

instant, and although the gypsies gave me shelter and attention throughout the night, and were good to me in all other ways, I could glean nothing from them relative to that girl. They laughed at me when I spoke of her, and told me I had imagined the whole scene—that no such girl existed, and that I was the victim of a delusion.

“What strange reason they had for concealing the truth I cannot imagine, but I knew then as I know now, and as surely as I shall prove when I find her, that that girl existed, and I saw her face.

“Shortly afterward the tribe vanished, and I was never able to trace it, although I have been ceaseless in my endeavors to do so. Night and day that face haunted me, until, in the hope that it would give me some clew to her, I painted that picture and exhibited it. The bare fact that I never painted its equal before, and never shall be able to do so again, tempts me to believe that I was inspired, Lord Keith. It is not for sale; poor as I am, no amount of money on this earth could tempt me to part with it. I shall keep it until I find the original, and *she* shall sell it for her wedding-dower. And I *will* find her, Lord Keith, if it takes me a lifetime. I will find her and tell her that *this* ‘Flower of the Forest’ has blossomed in my heart to live there forever!”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“LIES FATE BEFORE THEE—GO THY WAYS!”

ALL the while Herndon had been speaking his lordship sat with his eyes fixed upon the artist's face—a not unnatural conviction gradually taking shape in his mind, as he listened to this strange story, and the still stranger belief of its narrator—and, although he made no response when Herndon at length ceased speaking, his thoughts were busy, and he was silently wondering if this handsome, manly-looking artist were not mentally deranged.

The story itself certainly gave color to such a belief, and that color was heightened by Herndon's assertion that he would search until he found the mysterious gypsy maiden, whose face he had seen only for a second of time, and then proceeded to lay his talents and his heart at her feet.

“Poor fellow! he is quite ‘gone’!” thought his lordship, as he glanced over Herndon's superb physique. “What a pity! He is certainly one of the most superb specimens of manhood I ever saw, and his face takes my fancy out of hand. But there can be no doubt regarding his insanity, and I have my own ideas as to the original of his famous picture. Ten to one he has seen Inez some-

where; his marvelous memory for faces has aided him in producing a perfect likeness of her, and all the rest of his story has been born of his weakened brain. His mania does not seem to take a very desperate shape, but for Inez's sake, as well as for my own, I must take every precaution to keep him from discovering the truth."

All this my lord had said mentally—allowing neither word nor look to betray the conviction which had stolen over him relative to the diseased state of the handsome artist's brain, and feeling that it would be better to humor the fancy than to scoff at it, he said, presently:

"Your experience has, certainly, been a very odd one, Mr. Herndon, and I can only hope that you will be successful in finding the woman you so persistently seek. When I asked you who you had chosen for the original of your gypsy maiden, I simply did so because the face impressed me as being one of the most beautiful I had ever seen. I did not wish to intrude upon the 'sacred spot' which lies in every man's heart, and I had no idea to what my question would lead."

"Lord Keith need not trouble himself to tell me that," responded Herndon, smilingly. "His face will bear witness to the honesty of his character and the uprightness of his motive. Still, you must not imagine me a silly gabbler who tells his woes to all who approach him. When you came to me, and questioned me, I told you the story simply because I knew that you were in Carn Ruth at the same time she was there, and I hoped that you, too, had seen this mysterious and beautiful gypsy, and could give me some clew to her present whereabouts. I see now that it was a vain hope, sir, and I am sorry that I bored you by repeating the story."

"You have not bored me, Mr. Herndon; on the contrary, I have been exceedingly interested," responded his lordship, politely. "I am sorry, however, that the picture is endeared to you by such indissoluble bonds, for Lady Keith has taken a wonderful fancy for it, and would purchase it at any price."

"Lady Keith!" repeated Herndon with some surprise. "One may congratulate you then, upon having become a Benedict since I last saw you. Still, I might have guessed as much, you were so constantly in the company of that beautiful brunette at Carn Ruth. I do not recollect having heard the lady's name, but her *tendresse* for Lord Keith was manifest to the most casual observer. May I offer my congratulations, sir?"

Lord Keith smiled and nodded in the affirmative.

If Herndon chose to imagine that he had married Lady Blanche Hay, so much the better, he thought.

At any rate it would throw him off the track, and act as a safeguard to the wife he wished to screen.

"Yes, I have married since you last saw me, Mr. Herndon," he acknowledged; then, as an afterthought and in case the artist might hear of the fact or see some allusion to it in public print: "In fact, I may say that we are even now upon our bridal tour, sir, and my wife was formerly Miss Inez Catheron, granddaughter of Lord Darrel Glandore."

"I have heard of Miss Catheron," responded Herndon, "heard of her as one of the richest heiresses of all England."

Lord Keith smiled and nodded again.

"Yes," he said, "her wealth has enabled her to humor her slightest whim throughout her entire life, Mr. Herndon, and knowing that, you can readily understand how hard she will take the intelligence that she cannot purchase your picture after she has set her heart upon having it!"

"I am very sorry, Lord Keith, but I cannot sell it. It is to be the gift which secures the dower of my bride, and if Lady Keith could only wait until my marriage day, it may become hers after all!"

"There is some consolation in that, certainly, Mr. Herndon," responded his lordship. "Still, it will be a constant source of regret to Lady Keith to be confronted by it every time she visits the *salon*, and yet know that she cannot possess it. If it were where she could not see it, possibly it would not prey upon her mind so much, and, but that I am certain you would regret such a proposition, I would offer you almost any price to have it removed from the walls of the *salon* during our sojourn in Paris. But that of course is hopeless."

"Not so hopeless as you might think," responded Herndon. "How long do you propose remaining in Paris, sir?"

"One month, Mr. Herndon. Our bridal tour ends here, and at the expiration we shall return at once to England."

"Very well, the picture then shall be removed from the *salon* to-morrow, sir," responded Herndon, "and it shall not be exhibited again so long as Lady Keith remains in Paris!"

"My dear fellow, do you really mean it?" exclaimed his lordship, starting from his seat and wringing Robert Herndon's hand. "Upon my word, I am a thousand-fold obliged to you, Mr. Herndon. Tell me what price you ask for this stupendous favor, and I will send you a check for the sum this very night."

"My price? Nothing, Lord Keith!" returned Herndon, with a smile. "I am not so poor but I can afford to do a favor for my fellow-man without being paid for it, sir. And now as this has placed me under the necessity of writing an order for the picture's instant removal before starting for Fontainebleu, will you be offended if I ask you to put an end to our interview at once? I have only a few minutes to spare before I must be off—I have a commission to paint a forest scene for Le Comte de Vandroy, sir, and I am told there are some wonderful old trees at Fontainebleu. I wish to sketch some of them, and if I miss the opportunity to start to-day something may interfere to-morrow. Good-afternoon, Lord Keith. If you will do me the honor to call upon me again during your stay in Paris, I shall be most happy to see you, sir."

"Thank you," returned his lordship, as he wrung the artist's hand; then, after a few hurried remarks, he took up his hat, bowed himself out of the house, and stepped into the waiting fiacre.

Left to himself, Robert Herndon's first act was to sit down and scrawl a note to the directors of the *Salon de Paris*, ordering the instant removal of "La Fleur de Foret," then dashing up-stairs, he stalked into his own room, strapped together his camp-stool and easel, slung his portfolio across his shoulder, and was just in the act of searching for his hat when the door swung open softly, and a sweet-faced, sweet-mannered lady of two- or three-and-fifty came gently into the room.

"Hello, mother! Awake, eh?" smiled Herndon, good-humoredly. "I was just going to steal in and kiss you good-bye while you were asleep, dear, and now you've saved me the trouble. Do hunt up my hat for me, there's a dear. You know what a blind old bat I am when it comes to searching for anything."

"That's because you throw everything about the place as soon as you take it off, Robert," smiled his mother. "Here's your hat, under the bed, where I dare say you threw it when you came in this afternoon. I don't know what in the world you will ever do when I get too old to see for you."

"Oh, well, perhaps I shall have found *her* by that time, dear," he answered gayly; "and then, what is still better, perhaps she will cure me of my shiftless tricks and teach me how to be tidy."

Mrs. Herndon's face saddened visibly, and something like a sigh passed her lips.

"Oh, Robert, I'm afraid that you are only pursuing a phantom, my son," she said gravely. "I'm afraid that what those gypsies told you is true, after all—you only

imagined that you saw the beautiful creature whose face you have since painted, and if I could only reason you out of this folly which is spoiling the best years of your manhood——”

“It’s a hopeless case, I’m afraid, mother mine!” he interrupted, laughingly. “Now, then, kiss me good-bye like a dear good soul, and don’t worry about it any more. I sha’n’t be gone long, dear—not over two days at most—so you’ll have a chance to take a nice quiet rest while your nuisance is out of the house.”

“Not my nuisance—my *blessing*, Robert,” she answered, with a loving glance; then, slipping into the clasp of his great strong arms, she kissed him fondly, wished him Godspeed, and then let him go.

Stopping only to call a *commissionaire* and intrust him with the letter to the directors of the *salon*, Herndon strode away in the direction of the railway station, and some twenty minutes later he was wheeling away toward Fontainbleu and going fast as steam could bear him to an experience he was fated to remember all the days of his after-life.

CHAPTER XXXV.

“THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MICE AND MEN,” ETC.

THE dusk of the October evening had shut in when Robert Herndon alighted at his destination, and making his way through the rural streets of the quaint, picturesque old town of Fontainbleu to an inn which bore the singular name of La Main Rouge emblazoned upon its sign-board, over an exaggerated human hand painted in bright scarlet, he engaged lodgings, and ordered supper served at once.

It was, of course, too late now to think of attending to the business which brought him to this charming district; and, as he knew from experience that a day’s sketching meant a day’s tramping, he retired early, in order to have a sufficient rest before the arduous task of to-morrow.

Never a late sleeper, he was up at five o’clock, breakfasted, had his luncheon packed up, and set off at once for the world-famous Forest of Fontainbleu, returning at nightfall, dusty, tired out, and a trifle disappointed at having found nothing especially worthy of being perpetuated on canvas.

“Deuce take your Forest of Fontainbleu! It isn’t fit to be mentioned in the same day with the forests of America,” he grumbled, when mine host asked him over the supper table how the scenery had impressed him. “Here

I have been tramping through briars and over rocks and Heaven knows what else for over eight hours, and I am blessed if I can find anything worth sketching, beyond one or two 'bits,' that don't pay for the trouble. If I had been in an American forest, now, I'd have run over car loads of subjects in half the time. For all I could discover, there isn't a tree in the place worth reproducing."

"Trees!" repeated mine host, in evident chagrin. "Ah! m'sieur, it is all trees. *Ma foi!* it is ze tree-est place for trees in ze whole world—zat Fontainbleu. M'sieur can no haf been so far in as ze King's Walk and ze Glen of ze Nymphs.

"Oh, zere is ze trees, m'sieur! Zere is ze glory—ze beautifulness—ze—ze—what you call him in ze Anglaese? *Oui—oui!* ze pride—zat is him. Zere, m'sieur, is—is ze pride of Fontainbleu, zat Nymphs' Glen."

"How far is it?" demanded Robert, glancing up. "Can I reach it in any respectable time if I start early? How shall I go? I'm blessed if I know in what direction your Nymphs' Glen lies, landlord."

"Ah! zen I shall have ze great plashair of placing myself at ze sairvace of m'sieur to-morrow," responded mine host, glad of an opportunity to add a few francs to the bill, and at the same time vindicate the outraged dignity of Fontainbleu.

"We shall rise with ze sun, m'sieur's pleshair, and we will drive till we reach ze end of ze King's Walk—where a wagon can no further go—then m'sieur shall go ze rest of ze way on ze foot until he reach ze place where ze so grand trees do grow, and I will wait wiss ze wagon till he shall come back!"

This arrangement suited Robert, insomuch as it would save him the trouble of tramping over that part of the forest which he had already visited with so little success, and having completed all arrangements with the landlord, he walked up to his own room and lost no time in tumbling into bed and resting his weary limbs.

He slept that sweet, dreamless sleep which only comes of perfect health—slept, unconscious of the fact that he had reached the turning point in his young life, and that to-morrow was marked as his day of destiny.

At five o'clock mine host came up to call him, and found him already partially dressed, and after having disposed of a hearty breakfast, and ascertained that his lunch-box was well supplied, Robert bundled his "traps," as he called them, into the wagon, climbed in after them, and was soon bowling in the direction of the forest.

It was close to seven o'clock when they reached the forest, and mine host, who knew all the shorter cuts,

lost no time in reaching the entrance to the King's Walk (so named because it was a favorite with Louis XIV.), which proved, upon acquaintance, to be a very ordinary road through the woods, chiefly remarkable for the fact that, for the greater part of its length, it was bordered by a double row of poplars—those prim old maids of the forest—and certainly offered no attraction to “the eye artistic.”

A little after eight o'clock they reached the end of the King's Walk, and here, as the shrubbery was too dense and the rocks too massive for the wagon to proceed further, the landlord informed him that the journey must be continued afoot.

“Zere, m'sieur, follow zat way for about a mile!” exclaimed the landlord; “zen, when you reach the place where zere grows a dead tree on one leetle green mound, turn to ze right, and keep on till you come to ze glen. I will light my pipe and stay here until m'sieur shall return.”

“Better go home and come back for me this evening,” advised Robert, as he jumped down and removed his effects from the wagon. “I shall probably wander around all day, and there's no need for you to remain here. Come back for me at five o'clock, and I'll meet you at this place. How is the walking beyond there? It looks very wild. Any dangerous spots on the way to the glen?”

“Not when I was zere last, m'sieur; but zat is six or seven years, and it may haf changed.”

“Well, yes—rather!” returned Robert, with a laugh; then, with a final word of parting, he plunged into the depths of the forest, and left mine host to drive home alone.

For over an hour Herndon walked along, vainly looking for the “dead tree on one leetle mound,” (which mine host recollected seeing six or seven years ago), then, as he became aware that the ground was becoming marshy, and instead of a glen he was getting into a swamp, it suddenly occurred to him that a tree which was dead some six or seven years ago might have fallen and rotted into nothingness by this time, and facing about, he began to retrace his steps.

“Deuce take the fellow; why didn't he give me some more substantial landmark as a guide-post!” he muttered. “I must have walked two or three miles instead of one, and I'm hanged if I see the dead tree yet. I'll get out of this swampy part of the woods, and then strike out on my own hook, and maybe I'll blunder into the glen in spite of myself.”

Vain hope!

From nine o'clock until two he wandered about the woods; going first in this direction and then in that, until he had lost all reckoning, then, having stumbled across a "bit" that he thought worth sketching, he first disposed of his luncheon, then opened his portfolio and went to work.

Half an hour's application finished the sketch. He packed it away in his portfolio and resumed his tramp—much pleased to discover another and yet another "bit" as he progressed, and in this way the afternoon wore on.

It was very close to four o'clock when he did stumble across it—a deep ravine that was one long vista of beauty—and the grandeur of it amply repaid him for all that he had previously endured.

"By Jove! I must have that rock bit with the moss and the trickling water!" he exclaimed, delightedly. "And that clump of chestnuts, too, I can't miss that. No, nor that tree yonder, with the vines wrapping its trunk and festooning its boughs. Why the deuce didn't I strike this spot sooner? It's a perfect bower of beauty, and I must get all I can of it while the daylight lasts!"

He proceeded to do so without delay, but the daylight waned before he had sketched one-third of what he wanted, and willy-nilly, he knew he must go.

"Now then, for Old Renault and the wagon!" he exclaimed, as he packed away his sketches and strapped his portfolio across his shoulder. "I sha'n't be sorry to ride to the inn, that's certain, for I'm pretty well fagged out now!"

In his aimless wanderings, however, he had lost all reckoning, and, try as he might, it was impossible to determine in which direction lay the King's Walk.

"By George! I've lost myself, and I don't know which way to turn!" he exclaimed, vexatiously. "There are pleasanter things than being lost in the forest of Fontainebleau, and night coming on, that's certain, and if there's any way of obtaining them, I'll do my best to discover it!"

But his "best" proved poor, indeed, for turn which way he might, he saw nothing that looked like the King's Walk, and shout as he would, nothing but the echoes gave answer.

The darkness steadily increased, and finally night shut down—pitch black—and he knew he could go no further until the moon rose.

"It's no use shouting, for Old Renault has never waited this long!" he muttered, dismally, as he threw himself down upon the ground and stretched out his tired limbs—"I'm in for it this time, that's certain!"

At eight o'clock the young October moon rose, and he again resumed his wanderings, and this time with better success, for he suddenly stumbled upon a road, and knowing that it certainly must lead him in a more direct way than blundering about among the trees, he gladly followed it, not caring where it led, so that he got out of the woods.

At the expiration of two hours of swift walking, to his intense joy, he perceived that the forest was growing less dense, that the trees were fewer and further apart; and knowing by this that he was fast nearing the borders, he dropped into a jog trot, and was soon delighted to catch a glimpse of green hills and lonely meadow land.

"The end at last, thank Heaven!" he exclaimed, as he emerged from the forest and found himself in a sort of gap between the hills, and through which the road he had been following led in a direct line. "This is not Fontainebleu; I must have come out on the other side of the forest, and I am further off than ever from the place I want to reach. Confound such ill luck! I must have stumbled into the Pampeau Road which runs from Fontainebleu straight through the forest to Vallaine—distance of twenty-one miles—and it will be probably close to morning before I reach the village or come in sight of a habitation. Well, I must make the best of it, I suppose, and trudge along until I find some place of shelter, even if I do keep on going further away from Fontainebleu with every step. Anything is better than spending a night in that infernal forest, and I ought to thank my lucky stars that I've escaped it, after all. By George! how the good mother would worry, bless her, if she knew what a pickle her boy is in to-night."

He laughed as he thought of it, but his laughter was of short duration.

He had, while speaking, been striding along the road, which the faint glow of the young moon but dimly lighted, and in the very midst of that laughter which his thoughts had called up, Fate took him and whirled him on to the climax of that night's ventures.

A sudden cry—shrill, agonizing, dreadful—that was the thing which heralded it—the shriek of a woman suffering either mental or bodily torture; that he knew, and realizing it, he stopped short with a sudden gasp, and something cold seemed to creep through his hair and run down his back.

He whirled and glanced at the spot from which the cry arose, but in the dim light nothing was visible save a thick wall of immense chestnut-trees close to the borders of the forest.

"Just Heaven, what a shriek!" he gasped, in a dull

voice of horror. "It was a woman's voice, or else—There it goes again. Some poor creature is in need of assistance."

He never stopped to count the cost of the step after that—he only realized that a woman was in peril, and, realizing it, rushed to her aid.

Flinging aside his coat and portfolio, he sprung forward with one vigorous bound and raced like a madman in the direction of the screams which were now ringing forth and making the night hideous with their awful sound.

In less than a minute he had reached the wall of chestnuts, plunged through it, and stood before a house.

It was a small, two-story structure built of gray stone and entirely surrounded by a high stone wall, some ten feet beyond which the clump of chestnuts stood.

It was from behind this wall—which formed a quadrangle, in the midst of which the house stood—that the shrieks were rising—that Robert realized in an instant: but that realization was as nothing compared to the one which burst upon him a moment later.

The horrible guttural laughter of male voices, accompanied by the cracking of a whip and the agony of a woman's shrieks—these added to the ever varying location of the sounds—now near, now far—told him the dreadful truth—a woman was being pursued and beaten all around the inclosure.

"Help! help! help!" he could hear her cry, as he stood there under the shadow of the wall. "Help! murder! help! You cowards, let me go!"

And even as she spoke—blending its coarse notes of devilish exultation with the cracking of the whip and the woman's cries of pain:

"Try to escape again, will you!" exclaimed a man's rasping voice. "Give it to her again, Antoine. Let her taste what medicine we keep for people that manage to steal into the yard and try to scale the wall. Lash her well! lash her well—the daring one. Oho! you'll try it again, will you, eh, mademoiselle!"

The cracking of whips and the shrieks of pain sounded again, mingled with the brute laughter of the woman's pursuers, and with a sick sensation of horror Robert covered his ears.

"My God! I can't stand this," he panted, in a hoarse voice. "They're lashing some poor creature for trying to escape from this hideous house, and something must be done to save her from those human—devils!"

He glanced at the wall. It was fully fifteen feet high

and surmounted by a forest of broken glass stuck in mortar.

No hope of scaling that, and he knew it.

Then he glanced at the row of chestnuts standing ten feet in advance of the wall, saw that some few of their boughs reached beyond the line of the wall, but far above it, and without an instant's hesitation chose his course.

Springing toward one of the trees, he flung his powerful arms about it, twined his sturdy limbs around its shaggy trunk, and so, with those cries ringing in his ears the while, inch by inch, worked his way up until he grasped the lower branches.

It was easier work after that, and although he could *now* see as well as hear what was going on in the quadrangle, he set his teeth firmly, and silently climbed upward until his hands had closed upon one far-reaching branch some five or six feet above the summit of the wall.

He crawled out upon it, until his weight began to tell upon it and make it bow, and then with a sick sense of horror and despair, realized that he could not hope to reach its end, and drop within the quadrangle.

"My God! I cannot let this thing go on!" he groaned as the voices rang out anew, and by the faint light of the moon he saw the slim girlish figure staggering onward, and vainly trying to escape the two men, who pursued her, whip in hand, and rained blows upon her tortured body. "Let the risk be what it will, I must cross that wall and save her!"

Onward the woman came, and onward rushed her pursuers at her very heels.

For one moment Herndon paused irresolute; then, with a sudden movement, he gripped the bough, swung his body free, let it dangle for a second as he edged his way along—hand over hand, as close to the edge as he dare trust the branch—than swaying back and forth, until he had acquired the proper impetus, he suddenly launched himself forward, released his grasp upon his frail support, and clearing the wall by a hair's breadth landed with a dull, heavy sound within the inclosure.

He was up and on his feet in an instant; then, with the quickness of a lightning flash, he leaped upon the nearest man, his powerful fits came with a smash against the brute's face, and sent him flying backward to the earth, stunned, bleeding, unconscious.

It had all come so quickly and so unexpectedly, that before the other scoundrel could take to his heels this powerful interloper was upon him, something that felt like a mallet flew out and struck him upon nose and mouth, he went backward as though shot out of a catapult,

crashed against the wall, and dropped at its foot a mere heap of bleeding flesh, robbed of the vital spark—consciousness.

With a scream of sudden delight, the tortured woman sprung toward Robert.

"Save me! save me! sir, for Heaven's sake!" she cried.

But even as she spoke, his voice—full of a wilder joy—rose above hers, and springing forward, he caught her in his arms.

"At last!" he cried excitedly. "My darling! my darling! Heaven is good to me, and I have found you, my beloved, at last!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"MARRY, BUT HERE'S A VIXEN."

FILLED with an intense satisfaction, for his wife's sake, and an intense sorrow for Robert Herndon, to whom he had taken a sincere and honest liking, despite the feeling which had impelled him to visit the artist, Lord Keith drove back to the hotel, and lost no time in hurrying to Zillah's presence.

He found her in the company of Lady Blanche, looking pale and troubled, and her eyes betraying unmistakable signs of weeping, and the sight of her sorrowful face cut him so keenly that he could not refrain from rushing to her side and gathering her in his arms.

"Why, my darling, my darling! what is this?" he exclaimed, as he kissed her and patted her beautiful golden head, which fell forward on his bosom. "Tears, Inez, and our honeymoon not yet over! Sweet, you must not let little things trouble you like this. I know it was annoying to have your portrait, or what seemed to *be* your portrait, put upon exhibition in a public gallery (and worst of all in the character of a vagabond), but it was hardly worth taking so much to heart, dearest."

"Ah, Alaric, you are so good to me!" murmured Zillah, with a fresh burst of tears. "It was of you, I thought the worst. You seemed so hurt when you saw the picture and it—it has worried me ever since."

"Not so much hurt as indignant, Inez," he answered. "The idea of representing *you* as a low-lived gypsy! But there, dry your eyes, my darling, and don't waste another thought upon the subject. Everything has been arranged. I have seen Mr. Herndon, and the picture will be removed from the walls of the *salon* to-morrow morning."

"You purchased it, then, Alaric? Oh, I am so glad!"

"My dear, I didn't purchase it, simply because the art-

ist wouldn't sell it for any amount of money; but, by dint of a little strategem, I have managed to get it removed. Now, then, sit down, and I will tell you all about it, dear."

Thus admonished, Zillah dropped softly into a seat, and plunging into the affair without further preface, her husband told her of his interview with Robert Herndon, and the curious story of the artist's infatuation.

"The man is out of his senses, my darling," he concluded, "there can be no doubt about it. He has probably seen you at some time, and your dear face has made an impression upon his weak intellect. Not that you would suspect for an instant that it *was* weak, Inez, for he talks rationally upon all other subjects, and he is such a fine, manly fellow one cannot help admiring him. In these degenerate days of old young men, it seems such a pity that so magnificent a specimen of all that is truly manly should be blighted and spoiled by a curse like that. But there, we won't talk about the matter any more, and I really ought to have known better than to tell you the entire story, for I can see that poor Herndon's singular infatuation distresses you. There is no cause for worry, is there, Lady Blanche?"

"Oh, dear, no, not the slightest!" responded her ladyship, taking the hint. "Since this poor fellow believes that I am the fortunate creature whom Lord Keith married, he will not have any interest in discovering what the former Miss Inez Catheron looks like, my dear, so I wouldn't waste another thought upon the matter if I were you."

"Then I shall not!" responded Zillah, brightening at once. "You are both so good to me and so careful, that I know you will not let me fall into danger."

"Spoken like a sensible woman, my darling!" smiled his lordship, as he bent and kissed her. "And now, since I have been fortunate enough to secure a box for the opera to-night, and the afternoon is fast declining, I think you had better take a quiet rest, ladies, before you begin dressing."

"Are we then going to the opera, Alaric?" inquired Zillah, nervously. "I am almost afraid to risk it. You know how people stared at me to-day, and if this Mr. Herndon should happen to be there——"

"Dear Inez, don't you recollect what his lordship said but a few moments ago?" interrupted Lady Blanche, sweetly. "This poor fellow has gone to Fontainebleau to make some sketches for a future painting. Besides, he confessed his poverty, and poor people are not apt to squander their money in listening to operas, dear. As for any rep-

etition of the staring nuisance, you can easily remedy that by sitting back in the box where the curtains will screen you. Don't spoil our party, dear, for there really is no danger, I assure you. What is the opera to-night, Lord Keith?"

" 'La Favorita.' "

" Ah! Indeed? "—sweetly. " The story of a woman who deceived her lover, and who, while pretending to be all that was pure and noble, was, in reality, a low, despicable wretch. Ah! you will enjoy 'La Favorita,' Inez—the music is so grand. But I must run away now and give a few thoughts to the gown I am to wear to-night. "

Then, dropping a cool, little kiss upon Zillah's forehead, she spoke a few bantering words to Lord Keith, fluttered out of the room, and went tripping away to her own apartments.

Once inside of her private parlor, she hastily bolted the door, so that her maid might not intrude upon her privacy, sought and found her pretty, inlaid writing-desk, and, sinking down with it upon her knee, hastily prepared to indite a letter.

" The time has come, you puling turtle-doves! " she murmured, with a sneer. " I have waited for it a long while, but now it has come at last, and before many days my vengeance will find you out! "

Then dipping the pen into the ink, she bent over the tablet, and upon the sheet of note-paper she had placed in readiness, hastily wrote this:

" To-night at the opera without fail. At the left of the doorway after the performance is over.

" MAGGIE. "

She ran the blotter over the written sheet, folded it, slipped it into an envelope, and addressed it:

" MR. MARK TALFORD,

" No. 36 Rue des Morillons, Paris. "

Sealing the letter carefully, she arose, rung for a servant, and gave it to him, accompanied by some pieces of silver.

" Give this letter to a *commissionnaire*, and bid him deliver it immediately, " she said; then, as the door closed and the man took his departure:

" Keith, your days of peace are over! " then added, with a soft, purring laugh: " *My triumph begins to-night!* "

* * * * *

The first act of "La Favorita" was just ending.

Lord Keith's party arrived at the opera-house and filed into the box as the *finale* occupied the attention of everybody; to Zillah's intense satisfaction, she passed in

and took her seat without being noticed, save by one or two persons, who evidently had not seen "La Fleur de Foret," since they did not accord her more than a brief, passing glance.

As yet, Zillah, who loved music passionately, had not reached that fashionable state where the opera is regarded as an excuse for displaying sumptuous toilets, to enjoying the companionship of one's friends, with an occasional listless glance at the stage when some well-remembered passage was reached; and to her "La Favorita" took the shape of a rare musical treat.

She listened to it, absorbed with interest from first to last, and when the final curtain fell, a long, low sigh of regret escaped her trembling lips.

"Oh, Alaric, I am so glad we came!" she said; "I have enjoyed it so much. Can we not come again to-morrow night? See"—holding up her programme—" 'Dinorah' is announced, and I should so like to hear it."

"So you shall, dear, if you wish it," he murmured, as he folded her opera cloak about her white shoulders. "My only wish is to see you happy, and we will come every night, if it pleases you."

"I should like that," she answered with a smile; then, slipping her hand through his arm, she passed out with him to the waiting carriage.

My lady, who had persuaded them to allow the greater portion of the crowd to leave the theater before they started (under the plea that there would be less chance for a repetition of the staring annoyance), followed close at their heels, her hawk-like eyes flashing eagerly to the doorway as they emerged into the lobby, and she could scarcely repress a desire to laugh aloud when she beheld the figure of a man standing at the left of the entrance, holding in his hands a little square of board stuck full of *boutonniers*.

Like a flash she slipped forward and took her place upon the other side of Lord Keith; then, just as they reached the flower-vender:

"Oh, what lovely violets!" she exclaimed, in a distinctly audible voice, "and how very odd to see them sold upon the streets at this season of the year!"

The effect produced was just what she had aimed at reaching. Attracted by her remark, the flower-vender stepped forward, hopeful of finding a customer; and at the same moment Lord Keith and his wife turned to glance at the violets, to which her ladyship had directed their attention.

And all in an instant there was a strangely dramatic crisis,

With his wares extended, the flower-vender looked up into Lady Keith's face; he stepped back with a sharp, gasping cry, the board dropped from his hands, and just as her ladyship uttered a smothered cry, and crouched back against her husband, shivering, terrified, white as death:

"Zillah!" exclaimed the flower-vender, reaching out his hands toward her—"Zillah, beloved! thou hast again come back to earth! Marco! Marco! see—it is Zillah, the pride and glory of our sorrowing tribe!"

The man was Gypsy Jock!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"THE LITTLE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE."

NEVER, if life rounded itself out to the measure of a thousand years, would Lady Zillah Keith forget that moment of agony, when she lifted her eyes to the face of the flower-vender and recognized the features of Gypsy Jock.

It had all happened so quickly, so utterly without hint or warning, that she had no power to speak or to control her scattered senses; and but for the timely interference of Lord Keith, she might at that moment have fallen into the snare which Lady Blanche had so cunningly spread for her, and have betrayed the secret she longed so much to keep.

But, quick as a flash, and almost as Jock himself ceased speaking, Lord Keith stepped briskly forward and repelled the gypsy's advances by an indignant upward movement of his right arm.

"Stand where you are, fellow!" he exclaimed, angrily. "What do you mean by this insolence? Are you mad or drunk? or have you some dishonest motive for creating a disturbance, so that your confederates may plunder the crowd you desire to attract? Come now, sheer off this instant, you rascal, before I send for a gendarme and give you in charge."

The angry blood flamed up in Jock's face like a flash, and his eyes, glancing from Zillah's, darted a wrathful gleam into his lordship's own.

"Who are you, that you think you can make new laws to suit your own fancy, and put a curb upon a man's tongue at will?" he exclaimed, wrathfully. "Give me to a gendarme, will you, my fine cock-sparrow? For what? Because I have taken the liberty to speak to a woman whom I have known long before you ever set eyes upon her face?"

"You scoundrel! I——"

"No—don't you lift your hand against me, my friend—I'm a stronger and a better man than you, if it comes to a game of fisticuffs, and I'm not the kind to take a blow easily—especially from such as you, Lord Alaric Keith!"

"So you know me then, you rascal?"

"Yes, I know you, curse you! and I've good cause to know you, too, when you come between me and the hope of my life. I know you and I know *her*—ask her if I don't, and then see if you can make the gendarmes arrest a man for no other reason than recognizing an old friend!"

A faint, wavering cry from Zillah, accompanied by a heavy pressure upon his arm, checked the indignant speech which sprung to Lord Keith's lips, and turning sharply, he glanced at his wife.

"The man is mad!" she gasped, in a voice that was scarcely audible, so full it was of terror, "Don't you understand? It is that miserable picture again! Oh, will it never cease to haunt me? Please get me away, Alaric—our carriage is there at the curb—please get me away before he becomes violent!"

Having, as he believed, had one experience with a madman, regarding the original of "*La Fleur de Foret*," this charge seemed to Lord Keith a very feasible one, and darting Gypsy Jock a look of sudden comprehension, he beckoned Lady Blanche to follow, threw his arm about the waist of his wife, and without another word pushed his way through the crowd and whisked Zillah across the pavement to the door of the waiting carriage.

But Gypsy Jock was not to be thrown off in that way, for scarcely had his lordship wrenched open the door of the vehicle and assisted Zillah and Lady Blanche to spring in ere the Romany Rye rushed after them, as though he were in very truth a madman.

"I want to speak with that girl—I *will* speak with her!" he roared angrily, as he dashed through the crowd. "I know the game now! It was all a cheat and a sham—her disappearance! She went with you—went to what I warned her would be her ruin, and as for you—you who stamped the white rose in the dust, as I knew you would; for you, the fate I told her would be your reward if you proved to be her curse!"

As he finished speaking he reached the outer edge of the crowd that was teaming out of the opera house, and with the utterance of that final word, leaped like an angered tiger upon Lord Keith.

His lordship, standing with one foot upon the pavement

and one on the step of the carriage, whirled suddenly and met the advancing foe.

His right arm shot out like a flash, his clinched hand, landing with a dull, crushing sound upon the gypsy's lips, sent the man sprawling backward until he lost his balance and fell heavily upon the pavement, then grasping the opportunity to spring into the vehicle, his lordship banged the door, sung out "Home!" to the driver, and by the time Jock regained his feet, the carriage was dashing up the boulevard and fast disappearing among the dozens of other vehicles that were clattering away from the opera house, and my Lady Blanche Hay, leaning back among the cushions and fighting hard to conceal her chagrin, realized that the first step toward her cherished plan of vengeance, while not exactly a failure, was still very far from being a complete success!

She had, however, little opportunity to brood over her disappointment; for now that the terrible crisis was past, and, out of almost certain ruin, hope had again struggled into existence, the reaction set in, and Zillah, dropping heavily upon her ladyship's shoulder, sobbed and wept and laughed in violent hysteria.

"My darling, my darling, pray do not give way to this weakness, and don't—*please*, don't act so strangely, dear—it almost breaks my heart!" urged Lord Keith, as both he and Lady Blanche vainly strove to calm her troubled soul, and sooth her bewildered mind.

"Oh, this is terrible—terrible, Lady Blanche!" he went on. "She does not seem to know me, nor to heed a word I say. Give me your vinaigrette again, please! Inez, Inez, my darling! why do you allow the miserable affair to affect you like this? My Heaven! I wish we had never seen that wretched picture, and I wish the madman who painted it were at the North Pole, if every lunatic in Paris is to be excited by it, and put my darling to such misery as this!"

My lady rolled up her eyes and emitted a long, low sigh.

That Zillah, in her present state of mental suffering, was deaf and blind to all that passed, she very well knew, and knowing, could not resist the opportunity to insert the thin edge of the wedge, and begin constructing the breach between her two unsuspecting victims.

"It is strange—it is very strange!" she muttered, as though communing with herself. "Of course there can be no room for doubt concerning the insanity of the artist who painted 'La Fleur de Foret,' but it is very strange, and I cannot make it out!"

Lord Keith glanced up sharply, and a ridge gathered between his dark brows.

"Cannot make what out, Lady Blanche?" he said in a puzzled voice. "What is it that strikes you very strange?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing!" she answered evasively. "I was only thinking, that is all, and I have a bad trick of thinking aloud sometimes. I was not aware that you overheard me, Lord Keith. But pray don't let the affair trouble you for a minute. It is a mere bagatelle, and strange as it appears, really amounts to nothing. It isn't worth speaking of, especially when one recollects that poor Monsier Herndon is a lunatic, and *nobody* thinks of analyzing a lunatic's motives, or, perhaps, I *should* say, fancies!"

"Upon my soul, I don't know what you mean, Lady Blanche!" responded Lord Keith, with a slight, unsteady laugh. "Is there anything more to come out of that wretched picture? I believe I shall hire some unprincipled gamin to steal into the *salon* and ruin the thing if it grows any worse than it is already."

"Worse! Oh, you queer, fanciful male creatures! How blindly you leap at conclusions, to be sure! Who said it is any worse, I should like to know?" returned her ladyship, with a smile. "I was only remarking a certain peculiarity about it—a peculiarity which that little affair in the *foyer* of the opera house called to my mind, but I certainly did not say that it made matters any *worse*! What I did say was, that it was rather strange! But there! it really isn't worth talking about, so let it pass."

"With all my heart, if you'll only tell me what it is. If it doesn't amount to anything, it certainly can do no harm to mention it. Tell me now what was it that struck you as being odd about the picture, Lady Blanche? and why should that crazy fool at the opera house recall it to your mind?"

"Oh, dear, dear, what persistent creatures you men are!" responded Lady Blanche, with a smile and a shake of her pretty, dark head. "Why, the man recalled it to me, of course, simply because it was the most natural thing in the world that he should do so, and what I thought was strange was simply this: Don't you recollect the figure of the man who is drawing the gypsy maiden away from the sight of the wounded artist in '*La Fleur de Foret*'?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"Nothing, of course, only, as I say, it did seem strange that he should wear the same long buckskin leggings and black corduroy clothing, and that, while not exactly a por-

trait, the figure should bear a really noticeable resemblance to the crazy flower-vender who acted so queerly at the opera house to-night."

Lord Keith started perceptibly, the ridge deepened between his brows, he glanced sharply at the pale, tear-swollen face of his semi-unconscious wife, and a hectic flush swept over his own; swept and vanished and left it white as death.

"I had not remarked the fact before," he said, in a hushed voice. "Yes, it is rather strange, but, as you say, there can be nothing in it."

"Oh, certainly not," responded her ladyship, emphatically. "To harbor such a thought would be to doubt Inez, and to believe that the flower-vender spoke the truth when he claimed a former acquaintance with her; and who, pray, would be absurd enough to do that? Still, it was odd, was it not? when one recollects the peculiar story of the insane artist regarding the masked gypsy, whose presence among them all the members of the tribe were so anxious to conceal, and who, in the picture, bears such a marvelous likeness to our dear girl. If there were another face like hers in the wide world, one might easily account for everything upon the plea of mistaken identity; although"—opening wide the dark, andalusian eyes, and glancing up into his face with a look of childlike wonder and artless simplicity—"although, when one comes to think of it, the flower-vender seemed to make no mistake regarding *you*, Lord Keith, for he certainly addressed you by name."

Again his lordship started, and again the flush came and went over his half-averted face.

"Yes," he said, moistening his dry lips with the tip of his tongue, and speaking in a slightly unsteady voice—"yes, it is certainly very strange; but there can be nothing in it beyond the merest chance, of course. As for me, it is not the first time, by a dozen or more, that I have visited Paris, and as I have never had any cause for concealing my identity, somebody who knew my name might have pointed me out to the fellow."

"Oh, yes, indeed—that is *very* probable," responded her ladyship, sweetly. "There are a thousand ways in which he might have learned who and what you are. He may, even, have seen you in some other part of Europe—these gypsies travel about a great deal, and roam everywhere, you know."

"You think he was a gypsy, then?"

"Why, yes, of course! Don't *you*? He certainly looked like one, at all events; and then, when he addressed Inez, don't you recollect that he used the gypsy mode of expres-

sion—the pronouns ‘thee’ and ‘thou’—and even mentioned something about ‘the pride and glory coming back to his sorrowing *tribe*’? I never thought him anything *but* a gypsy—did you?”

“I don’t know. I never stopped to think about the matter at all!” responded Lord Keith, in a troubled voice. “But what does it signify, anyhow? Let us avoid the wretched subject altogether, and give our attention to Inez. She is growing calmer, I think, and I do hope that she will be herself again by the time we reach the hotel.”

“So do I, poor dear!” returned her ladyship, gently stroking the golden head which lay upon her bosom; “for she really seems to be suffering intensely, and for so slight an affair takes it very much to heart—much more than is necessary, when one recollects that it cannot in any way reflect upon *her*, and being Lord Glandore’s granddaughter, could not possibly have any sympathy with such *cattle* as gypsies! The old earl’s enmity to the race is almost proverbial, and Inez shares it to no small degree. She has so little feeling for the vagabond race, that it seemed odd she should take this affair so much to heart!”

Lord Keith made no reply, and, save that the ridge between his brows became deeper, and the pallor of his face more pronounced, gave no sign that he even heard my lady’s words, and sinking back in the cushions well pleased with the impression she had made, her ladyship eyed him from beneath her dark brows, and smiled a smile of quiet satisfaction.

Meanwhile the carriage kept clattering on, and Zillah, whose nervous excitement had gradually been subsiding, had entirely recovered from her hysterical fit by the time it reached the hotel.

Lord Keith, with his accustomed tenderness, assisted her to alight as the vehicle came to a halt at the curb, and, supporting her with his strong arm, led her up-stairs, and after bidding her ladyship good-night, conducted her to the parlor of their private suite.

Not until now had he spoken one word to her regarding the experiences of the night; but as the door closed upon Lady Blanche, and Zillah, with a faint, low sob of wretchedness, sunk heavily into a chair, he came forward, and taking her cold, limp hand in his, seated himself upon an ottoman at her feet.

“Dearest,” he said, very tenderly—“dearest, you are taking this affair too much to heart. Why should you let the mere raving of a madman effect you like this?”

“I don’t know,” she answered, feebly. “Perhaps it was the story you told me to-day—the story of that insane artist—and the fear which came of it. Was—was he—*he* the

painter, Alaric? That man who spoke to me, I mean? Was he the artist who painted 'La Fleur de Foret'? I fancied that he might be, and the terrible thought almost frightened me to death."

Her words, explaining, in a measure, the cause of her undue excitement, drove all other thoughts from Lord Keith's mind, and, glancing up with a smile, he softly patted the cold white hand which lay in his.

"No, dearest, that was not the man," he said. "I wondered why you were so terribly excited, but this, of course, explains all. So you feared that the man who accosted you was the American, Robert Herndon, eh? No wonder you were terrified, my darling!"

"I did not know but what he would do me some violence!" she answered, in a nervous voice. "But since you tell me he is *not* the man, I am terrified all the more. Oh, Alaric, why did we ever come to this terrible Paris? It is a city of lunatics—a city of terrors—and I shall be glad when we leave it forever. Let us remain here no longer, my husband; that wretched picture will haunt me if we do, and drive me into madness. Let us go away to-morrow, Alaric. I am eager to see grandpa and Glandore!"

"'As the queen wills,' my darling," he quoted, with a smile. "I thought you would be happy here, but now—Our honeymoon will end a month sooner than we thought, Inez, and you were so sorry this morning that it was even *near* its close."

"But I want to go home—I must go home!" she answered, in a strident voice. "That miserable picture has destroyed all my happiness. I shall be afraid to venture forth if we remain here longer. Alaric, say that you will take me home in the morning, and I will be satisfied."

"I will take you home in the morning, dearest," he repeated, tenderly. "Your will is my will, Inez, and, since you wish it, to-morrow we shall return to Glandore."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

THE joy of that marvelous discovery well-nigh made Robert Herndon shriek aloud in his delight; and, as Miss Catheron tottered forward and faintly sunk into his outstretched arms, he would not at that instant have changed places with the loftiest potentate in all the world.

"Oh, sir, save me! in pity, save me!" panted Miss Catheron, clinging to him in trembling terror, and lifting her

dilated eyes to his. "They will kill me in this dreadful place—save me, oh, save me, before their torture makes me as mad as they declare I am!"

"Save you!" repeated Robert, with a thrill of happiness in his voice. "Ay, if an army rose to prevent it. I have been seeking for you so long, my dear one—so long, that now I have found you, no power on earth shall tear you from these protecting arms."

Miss Catheron's bright, blue eyes flashed suddenly up into his—she had heard his words—and for one instant a dreadful suspicion—a suspicion of his sanity—flashed across her tortured brain.

But no madness looked back at her out of those adoring eyes, and no shattered reason was manifest in that handsome, manly face.

"Oh, sir," she cried out in a broken, heart-wrung voice—"oh, sir, it must have been Heaven that sent you to save me from the horrors of this fearful place. I am not mad, as Heaven hears me, I swear to you that I am not mad—and yet, for four horrible months, I have been shut up here in this madhouse, as though I had not a friend in all the world!"

"A madhouse!" repeated Herndon, starting violently, and glancing about him. "Is *that* what this place is? My Heaven! and to think I should find you here—in a madhouse!"

"Yes, and the most horrible of madhouses!" she answered with a sob. "For here brutality rules, here savages have full sway, and I, without being mad, am locked up with lunatics, and, if I raise my voice in protest, beaten like a dog, and treated to tortures that would make your blood run cold to hear them. But, oh, do not let us waste time in talking of my misery now. Only let me get free of this horrible place, and I will tell you the whole miserable story afterward. There is a gate there, in the wall, and if we could procure the key——"

"Where is it?" interrupted Robert, excitedly. "Tell me who guards it, dear—tell me where to find it—and if a dozen such rascals as these stand between me and it, I'd have it or die in fighting to gain your liberty! Where is it, dearest? tell me—tell me at once!"

"He has it—that man—Dr. Mortiere—the proprietor of this terrible place!" responded Inez, pointing to the figure of the first man Robert had knocked down. "He always carries the keys of the institution fastened to his belt, and if you can take them from him——"

"If I can?" interrupted Robert, with a laugh, as he rushed to the man in question, and, turning over his inanimate body, felt for the keys, and, finding them,

snapped the string which bound them to his waist. "See! How easily I can, dear! Look! I have them already. Now show me the gate, and in another minute we will be outside the wall!"

With a short, swift cry of gladness, Inez beckoned him to follow her, and, turning, darted to the opposite side of the quadrangle, where a heavy, iron-studded gate, set close to the angle of the wall, gave egress from the dark inclosure.

"It is here—it is here!" she cried, excitedly, as she placed her hand against it, and, darting briskly to her side, Robert passed his hand along the heavy, iron-studded panels until his fingers touched the keyhole.

The size of the aperture assured him that the key must be a large one, and, guided by this, he selected the biggest of the bunch, slipped it into the lock, gave it a turn, and in one moment the door stood open.

Catching Inez by the shoulder, he thrust her out of the quadrangle, followed swiftly, and, pausing a moment to lock the gate, flung the keys away, and hastily rejoined her, as she fled in the direction of the high-road.

"Oh, bless you, sir, bless you!" as he darted to her side. "You have saved me from the most horrible fate I ever dreamed of, and if I can ever hope to reward you——"

"Hush!" he interrupted, gently. "Can I ask for any reward greater than the one that Heaven has already given me? I have been seeking you night and day since that blessed time when I first beheld your dear face, and I thank God that I have found you, after all. I know not who you are—nor what you are—save that you cannot belong to the tribe nor yet the race of those with whom I first saw you, for every feature of your dear face stamps you of a higher birth; but *this* I do know: the search of years is over, and Heaven has blessed me at last!"

Inez turned sharply and glanced at him—they were hurrying briskly down the road which led to Vallaine—and a puzzled look gathered upon her pale, sweet face.

"I do not understand you," she said. "Have we, then, met before? Indeed, I cannot recollect it, sir."

"Why should you?" he answered. "To you, perhaps, it was but an episode, but to me, a destiny. But, there, let us talk no more at present. Until you are out of the reach of the rascals who run that fearful place from which you have just escaped, it is better that we should give our entire attention to gain some place where we can find rest and shelter for the night. To-morrow I will take you back with me to Paris where my mother lives, and if you like, you can tell me your story then. At present we have a long walk before us, and it is better that we

should endeavor to get as far from the asylum as fate will allow, before those rascals recover consciousness to give pursuit."

Thus admonished, Inez ceased talking, and supported by his strong arm, ran with him in the direction of Vallaine.

A mile or so down the road they were fortunate enough to come upon a lonely farmhouse at the foot of the hill, and hazarding a rebuff, Robert walked up to the door, and aroused the inmates.

"We have been lost in the forest of Fontainbleu, my good man, and are anxious to reach Vallaine," he explained, as a head was thrust from one of the upper windows, and a sleepy, masculine voice inquired the cause of the disturbance. "If you can furnish us with a vehicle and drive us to the village, I will pay you any price you may ask for the service."

The man needed no further urging, and sniffing a good, fat fee in return for a couple of hours' lost sleep, hastily dressed himself, prepared the vehicle, and in less than twenty minutes the journey to Vallaine was begun.

Arriving at the village, Robert paid and thanked the man for his services, and ascertaining from him that the Paris train was due at Vallaine station within an hour, wisely concluded that it were better to put as much ground as possible between Inez and the keepers of the *maison de sante* while he had the opportunity, and instead of applying for lodgings at the village inn, led his half-exhausted companion to the little railway station and ushered her into the waiting-room.

"Rest here," he said gently, as he escorted her to a seat. "It will not be many minutes before the train comes along, nor yet many hours before you are safely housed and in the charge of my dear old mother."

"Oh, sir, you are very good to me!" exclaimed Inez, lifting her beautiful eyes to his (and finding time, even then, to remark how handsome he was). "How shall I ever thank you—how prove to you my gratitude for all that you have done?"

"I need no thanks," he answered, with a careless smile. "I would have done as much for the veriest stranger, but to do it for you is indeed a blessing, and I ask no greater boon. Ah, how my dear mother will stare when she sees you and knows that the picture I painted was not born of fancy, after all. I am an artist, you know—or, no, you *don't* know, since you have forgotten that night in Wales—so, if you will permit me, I will introduce myself. I am an American by birth, and my name is Robert Herndon."

"And mine is Inez Catheron," responded she, gracious-

ly. "I am the granddaughter of Lord Glandore, of Glandore Court, from whence I was abducted last summer, Mr. Herndon, and conveyed to the place from which you have just rescued me!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CROSS PURPOSES.

ROBERT uttered a cry of amazement, and recoiling a step, stared at her with blank, bewildered eyes.

"Inez Catheron!" he exclaimed, suddenly; "Inez Catheron, the Earl of Glandore's grandchild? Do you mean—can you mean to claim that you are she?"

"Not only claim, but prove the truth of my words, Mr. Herndon," returned Inez, earnestly. "I have been the victim of one of the wickedest and most mysterious schemes imaginable. Only think, sir, I was abducted from my own home, almost in sight of a hundred people who knew and would gladly have aided me—abducted by men whose faces I never saw before, and whose very names I do not know even yet, and the cause of whose enmity I cannot fathom, save that one of them was a gypsy, and my grandfather's abhorrence for creatures of that class has passed into a proverb. It happened last June, Mr. Herndon—happened upon the night we gave the private theatricals at Glandore Court—and within six weeks of the time when I was to have been married!"

"Married!" repeated Robert, growing very pale. "My Heaven! married to whom?"

"To Lord Alaric Keith," she answered—"to Lord Alaric Keith, of Lancedene, Mr. Herndon!"

"Lord Alaric Keith!" gasped Robert, his mind traveling back to that memorable interview in the little parlor of No. 27 Rue des Anges, and the words Lord Keith had uttered then, relative to his newly married wife. "My dear girl, your memory must be playing you some cruel trick. Why, Lord Keith is at present in Paris, and——"

"In Paris!" cut in Inez, excitedly. "Alaric in Paris? Oh, Mr. Herndon, are you sure of what you say?"

"So sure that I saw and spoke to him two days ago. He did me the honor of calling upon me, and when I spoke to him of you——"

Miss Catheron clasped her hands with an excited cry, and a fitful wave of color came and went across her lovely, eager face.

"He was searching for me, then?" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Oh, how he must have suffered since that terrible night, and what a dreadful blow it must have been to grandpapa and Aunt Alicia! What did Alaric say to you,

Mr. Herndon? Was he very much excited? Had he found some clew to my whereabouts? and was that how you came to be at the madhouse to-night?"

"No," returned Robert, gravely. "My presence there was due alone to accident; and Lord Keith's mission, when he honored me with a call, was to purchase a picture for—his wife."

"His wife!" almost shrieked Inez, leaping to her feet as though propelled by electrical force, and staring at Robert with a face as white as death. "Alaric Keith's wife, did you say? He has married, then?—married so soon after my disappearance, and I—— Who is she?—who is his wife? Tell me—tell me, I implore?"

"I have not seen her since their marriage!" returned Robert, in a hushed voice; "but Lord Keith himself volunteered the statement that she was formerly Miss Inez Catheron, Lord Glandore's grandchild, and that——"

He never finished the sentence. With a cry of mingled terror and surprise, Miss Catheron fell away from him and dropped back into a seat in a sort of collapse.

"Married *me*—married *me*!" she gasped, in a palpitating voice. "Oh, sir, it is impossible! I am married to no one, Mr. Herndon! How could I be, when I have been locked up in a madhouse ever since last June? Oh, sir, this is some cruel hoax, or else—or else——"

Her voice died away in a faintly sibilant whisper, as a thought almost too terrible to mention took shape in her agonized brain, and, cowering away from him, she shivered back into her seat, and clasped her hands so tightly that the blood receded from her finger-nails and left them white as pearls.

There was a momentary hush, and then:

"Will you take me to Lord Keith when we reach Paris, Mr. Herndon?" she asked, fighting hard to steady her voice and appear calm. "Please promise me that you will do that, for I cannot, oh! I cannot believe it possible that he is married until I hear it from his own lips! You will take me to Lord Keith, oh! say that you will, Mr. Herndon, and I will be your debtor for life!"

"I will take you to him, yes!" he answered. "I do not know where he is stopping, but I can easily find out, as soon as we reach Paris. But, hark! here comes our train at last, Miss—Miss Inez; and if the keepers of the madhouse have any idea of overtaking us, they had better abandon it, for we shall soon be beyond their reach!"

Inez ventured no reply. Crouching back in her seat, a prey to the deadliest fear, she sat and watched with her dilated eyes until the train steamed up to the station, and,

with a reverent tenderness, he assisted her to rise and enter it.

Two minutes later they were steaming up the tracks in the direction of the gay French capital, and, shut in with her rescuer in the compartment which they alone occupied, Miss Catheron again sunk into a seat and again watched him.

"How little you are changed," he said, presently, "and how well I carried the memory of your face, after all! You shall see the picture I have painted of you, and tell me if it is not a perfect likeness. I wish you had remembered me, Miss Inez. Can you recall nothing of that night which made such a lasting impression upon *my* mind?"

"Which night?" she queried, nervously. "I—I do not understand to what you allude, Mr. Herndon."

"The night when I first saw you," he answered—"that blessed night at Carn Ruth in Wales."

"In Wales!" she repeated, faintly. "I—I think I never was in Wales, Mr. Herndon."

He glanced at her half smilingly, half sadly, and stifled a sigh.

"Perhaps my memory is not so good, after all," he said, "and perhaps it wasn't in Wales. But what does it signify whether it was in one place or the other? You shall tell me when you are rested why your companions refused to acknowledge your existence, and why you wore a mask that night. It were a thousand pities to cover such a face. You are so little like other gypsies that——"

"Gypsies!" The word dropped from her lips with such a strange tone of mingled surprise and horror that Robert glanced at her in alarm. "I am not a gypsy, Mr. Herndon, and I never was among gypsies in all my life. Oh, sir, oh, Mr. Herndon, I beg, I entreat of you to believe what I say is true! I am Inez Catheron, Lord Glandore's grandchild, and not a vagabond of the woods and fields!"

"I do believe you, Miss Inez," soothed Robert, tenderly. "But we will not talk of it any more since it distresses you like this. Let me roll my coat into a pillow for you so that you may sleep awhile and be rested when we reach Paris. Nay, I insist. You are worn and spent with the horrors of this dreadful night, and you must let me do all I can to make you comfortable now and—hereafter."

He smiled as he watched her rest her head upon the impromptu pillow; then turning away with a smothered sigh, he rested his folded arms upon the ledge of the car window and stared gloomily out into the October darkness.

"Found at last!" he sadly mused—"found, after two years' searching, within the walls of a French madhouse,

and found—like this! Oh, fate! fate! how cruel that the light of reason should be removed from such a lovely shrine! Mad! mad! and I—— God help me—God pity me! mad or sane I love her now as I loved her then, and as I shall love her always to the day I die!”

CHAPTER XL.

“SWEET PITY! WHITHER WILT THOU LEAD?”

In the gray light of the October morning the train steamed into the depot at Paris, and Inez, who, in spite of her doubts regarding the sanity of her companion, had succumbed to the demands of exhausted nature and fallen asleep, was aroused from her slumbers by Robert gently touching her shoulder and bidding her arise.

“We are at our journey’s end, Miss Inez,” he said, with a kindly smile of reassurance, as she sprung to her feet with a feeble exclamation of terror, and retreated as far from him as the limited space of the compartment would allow. “Pray do not alarm yourself; no harm will come to you while I am here, my poor girl. Did I awaken you too roughly? Forgive me for it; I only wished to tell you that we had reached Paris at last, and the guard will be here presently to unlock the compartment, and allow us to proceed on our way to join my mother.”

“You are very kind, Mr. Herndon,” stammered Inez, confused at finding that, far from being compelled to battle with a madman during one of his violent periods, her companion seemed even quieter and more rational than before. “I—I think I must have been dreaming at the time you touched me, and I was so startled I scarcely knew what I did. Have I been sleeping very long?”

“Almost the entire time since we left Vallaine,” he answered, with a smile. “I hope you feel rested. I tried to make you as comfortable as I could, with the limited means at my command. But now, as the guard is coming, I think it will be advisable for me to make myself a little more presentable.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Inez, starting and blushing, as she suddenly became aware that his coat and waistcoat had both been removed to further her comfort, “oh, you have been traveling like that all night, when the air is so raw and cold at this season of the year! It is good of you—very good of you to do so much to make me warm and comfortable, Mr. Herndon; but you should not have exposed yourself to the peril of cold and illness. I should have done well enough without forcing you to make such a sacrifice as this.”

"You are worrying yourself about nothing!" he answered, with a careless, good-humored laugh. "What is a breath of air to a great healthy fellow like me? Why, I never knew an hour's real sickness in my life; and, far from suffering any inconvenience from the exposure, as you are pleased to term it, I assure you it was quite a relief to be rid of some of my extra clothing."

Nevertheless, he shivered a trifle as he said it—for the early morning air was sharp and frosty—and he seemed nowise reluctant to replace the "burden" of which he had complained.

Miss Catheron, however, had no opportunity to mention this, even though she noticed it, for at that moment the guard unlocked the compartment, and Robert, catching her by the arm, hurried her out into the dim, misty light of the young morning, led the way to a spot where some half dozen fiacres were stationed about the public square, just opposite and but a few yards removed from the *facade* of the magnificent depot, and approaching the nearest, opened the door and assisted Inez to enter before even the enterprising driver was really aware that he had secured a customer.

"To No. 27 Rue des Anges, my man," he called out as he stepped in after his companion and banged the door behind him. "Drive fast and you shall have no reason to complain of your *pour-boire*!"

The cabman touched his cap, remounted his seat, and gathering up the reins drove briskly away in the direction indicated.

Half an hour later saw the journey at its end, and having assisted Inez to alight, Robert paid the driver, gave him a generous *pour-boire* and, after dismissing him, led Inez through the gateway and across the trim little courtyard to the door of his humble but neat abode.

Early as the hour was, and it was not yet six o'clock, Mrs. Herndon was already "up and doing," as the raised curtains and open shutters of the villa testified, and scorning all ceremony in a truly American fashion, Robert fished out his latch-key, opened the door, and as he escorted his companion across the threshold and into the humble little parlor, sung out cheerily:

"Hello, there! Mother! where are you? It is I—Robert, and I have brought you a visitor."

Through the open doorway which led to the kitchen, and where he knew by the aroma of coffee and beef-steak his mother was engaged in the process of preparing her solitary breakfast, a faint, joyous cry floated out to him, followed instantly by the rustle of skirts and the patter of

hasty footsteps, and almost in a twinkling she rushed out into the hallway and caught him in her arms.

"Robert, my dear, dear boy!" she exclaimed, as she embraced him. "Oh, this is indeed a glad surprise. Why, I did not dream of seeing you before nightfall at the very earliest. What fortunate chance has sent you back to me as soon as this?"

"Come and see," he laughed, as he kissed her affectionately. "You have so long believed me a dreamer, mother darling, and now I am going to prove to you that I am no more fanciful than your dear, practical old self. Didn't you hear me say that I had brought you a visitor? Come and see who it is."

As he spoke he wound his arm around her waist, and only granting her sufficient time to remove her kitchen apron, and give her hair a preparatory brush with the palms of her shapely old hands, led her gently to the door of the parlor, and ushered her into Miss Catheron's presence.

"My mother, Miss Inez," he said, as he approached the chair where his *protegee* was seated, with her back turned to the light, and her sweet face drooping. "Mother, dearest, I am sure you will gladly welcome this young lady to our home. I was fortunate enough to rescue her from the hands of a brute who keeps a private madhouse in the Pampeau Road, near the forest of Fontainbleu. Tell her that—that you are glad to receive her for her own sake as well as for mine."

"Can she doubt it, since *you* have brought her to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Herndon, hurrying forward with both hands extended. "Welcome, my child—welcome a thousand times. Indeed, I am only too happy to offer you the shelter and protection which——"

She stopped abruptly—stopped with a sudden, startled cry—and stood quite still, staring in breathless surprise at the figure before her; for, touched by that tender, motherly greeting, Miss Catheron had risen with some words of grateful acknowledgment for the welcome extended her, the light from the window slanted across her beautiful, sorrowful face; her lovely, tear-dimmed eyes were raised to Mrs. Herndon's own, and, seeing her there and thus, the widow knew at last what her son had meant when he spoke of the "fancy" which had grieved her so much.

"Robert!" she exclaimed in a startled voice, "Robert, you have found her at last! It is the original of 'La Fleur de Foret,' and after all it was not a dream."

"Was it not?" he answered, with a slight laugh. "Miss Inez seems to think it was, mother, and surely—this with a significant glance at Mrs. Herndon—"surely she should know. Wait until you have heard her story,

and perhaps you will think me a greater dreamer than ever. She disclaims all connection with any gypsy tribe, and far from being one of that race, assures me that she is the granddaughter of Lord Glandore, an English peer, and that she is the victim of some unknown enemy, who caused her to be incarcerated in the private madhouse from which I last night rescued her!"

"A madhouse!" gasped Mrs. Herndon, growing very pale, and at the same time darting her son a glance which told him that she understood what he wished to imply by the carefully constructed speech; then, as her gaze returned to Inez and her eyes looked into every detail of that beautiful, sorrowful picture she made, standing there so utterly alone, so utterly helpless:

"My child—my dear, dear child, is this really true?" she added, fluttering forward and taking her in her arms. "Your misfortune makes you doubly welcome, even though you were as poor as poverty itself!"

"But I am not poor, dear Mrs. Herndon!" exclaimed Inez, bursting into tears and dropping her head upon the widow's shoulder. "I assure you that I have spoken the truth, as investigation will soon prove. I am Inez Catheron, one of the richest heiresses of England, Mrs. Herndon. Although your son seemed to have mistaken me for some one else, I am Inez Catheron, granddaughter of the Earl of Glandore, and if you will only let me tell you my story, I think I can convince you that I tell the truth!"

Mrs. Herndon signified her willingness to listen, and Inez, taking up the story of her young life, told it—as we have lived it with her, from the hour she became betrothed to Alaric Keith to that darker and more dreadful one when Robert rescued her from the madhouse on the Pampeau Road.

"There! there! there! you shall not speak any more of the wretched experience!" soothed Mrs. Herndon, when, upon mentioning what Robert had told her relative to Lord Keith's presence in Paris with his wife, poor Inez broke down and burst into tears. "Come, now, let me lead you up-stairs where you can make your toilet while I am preparing breakfast, and after that Robert and I will go with you to the hotel where Lord Keith is stopping, and everything will soon be right. Robert,"—laughingly—"please consider that you are conducting bachelor's hall this morning and that you expect visitors to breakfast. I shall be busy assisting Miss Catheron for the next half hour."

"All right, mother," he responded gayly. "I'll have everything ready by the time you come down, and there'll

be nothing left for *you* to do but to clap the steak on the gridiron and get it ready for the table. Don't stop to give me any directions. I know where the dishes are; and if I can't cook, I can at least make everything ready for the *chef's* practical hand. Run along, mother mine, and I promise you that the table shall be set as good as though you had done it yourself."

Then stalking out of the parlor into the dining-room, he proceeded to fill this promise to the best of his ability, and really did so well that when, some twenty minutes later Inez came down arrayed in the prettiest of his mother's wrappers, with her fair hair brushed and becomingly arranged, and following Mrs. Herndon's lead, discovered him in the act of garnishing the table with some bunches of chrysanthemums which he had gathered from the garden, she could not refrain from laughingly complimenting him upon his skill.

"Why, bless you, that's nothing," he asserted, with a slight air of masculine authority. "I never did the thing before; but a man's own wit would tell him just what to do *without* experience when he attempts such a simple thing as setting a table!"

"So it seems, my dear!" retorted Mrs. Herndon, bursting into a laugh. "You have done excellently, Robert, most excellently, and now, if you wouldn't mind putting on a table-cloth instead of my ironing-sheet, and recollecting that we don't need soup-plates for breakfast, I'll go in and broil the beefsteak while you make the necessary alterations."

"Let me assist you, Mr. Herndon," smiled Inez, after the laughter had subsided, and Robert, looking red and rather sheepish, was staring at the soup-plates and the ironing-sheet, and pulling out the ends of his big mustache in reflective silence. "We will soon put matters to rights if you will only submit to a little feminine guidance. I am quite willing to believe that you never *did* set a table before; but in case of future necessity let me give you a few hints now."

"Thanks. I dare say I *do* need 'em, after all," returned Robert, with a good-humored laugh.

Then, following her directions, he assisted in making the necessary alterations without delay.

"I want to beg your pardon for having, perhaps, been very rude, Mr. Herndon!" exclaimed Inez, looking up, and then, with a confused blush, letting her eyes fall as they met his. "Your mother has been telling me of your Welsh experience—in the gypsy camp, I mean—and I know now how you came to make that mistake regarding

my identity! Will you forgive me for cherishing some very unjust thoughts in regard to you?"

"I will forgive you anything, Miss Inez!" he answered bluntly. "Whatever is in my power to grant you, is yours for the asking. If you have heard the story, you must know what came to me that night in Wales—came, never to leave me so long as life lasts—and the woman who bears that face could ask nothing at my hands that I would not gladly give."

Miss Catheron's eyes fell as they read but too plainly the story that was written in his, and a thrill of pity tingled through her heart.

"I should like to see the picture you have painted, Mr. Herndon," she said, with a confused blush. "It must be a superb work to create such a furor in *blase* Paris, as your mother tells me it *has* created, and I should like to see it very much indeed; may I?"

"I have already told you that you have but to express the wish, and if it is mine to give it should be fulfilled," he answered, ardently. "The picture shall be brought here to-day. I have no longer any reason for exhibiting it."

Inez turned away with a soft, regretful sigh, and made a feint of adjusting the bouquets on the table.

"Poor fellow!" she thought, as she stole a glance at his reflection in the mirror over the mantel. "It is too bad that I should spoil his life like this. It is a thousand pities that he should be insane upon that one subject, when in all else he seems such a king among men. How noble he is—how brave—how manly—and, oh, how very handsome—much handsomer, even, than Alaric; and yet— Oh, I pity him, I pity him from the bottom of my heart!"

The appearance of Mrs. Herndon at this juncture, bearing in her hands a large tray loaded with steaming viands, put a period to her silent musings, as well as to a continuance of the subject nearest to Robert's heart; and in a few moments later breakfast became a reality, where it had before been but a name.

CHAPTER XLI.

"CRASH DOWN, OH, DARK, DESTROYING BOLT!"

It was fully half-past seven o'clock before the happy, homelike meal came to an end, and Inez, whose heart had gone out at first to the dear, motherly, little old lady who had received her so warmly, felt herself drawn closer to her with every movement; and between this fondness for the mother, and this pity for the son, there grew up in

her heart a regret for the time when she must leave them and return to the home from which she had been so mysteriously removed.

"And now, my dears, as there really isn't the slightest excuse for sitting here any longer, since we have eaten everything on the table, and Robert has succeeded in completely draining the coffee-pot, I think we may as well come to the conclusion that breakfast is over at last," smiled Mrs. Herndon, as she pushed back her chair and arose. "I know that you both must be as tired as can be after last night's affair, so if Robert will run up-stairs to his own room, and you will take possession of mine, Miss Inez, I really think it will benefit both of you to steal forty winks while I attend to my household duties."

"A capital idea, mother mine," responded Robert, giving her an affectionate squeeze. "Don't you think so, Miss Inez? You are bearing up bravely, but all the same I am sure that you must feel the need of a little rest after so much excitement."

"You forget that I slept all the way from Vallaine to Paris, Mr. Herndon," returned Inez smiling, and fighting hard to keep back the blush, which somehow would drift over her face whenever her eyes encountered his and read there the story he could no more have concealed than he could have bidden his heart to cease beating at his will. "It is you who need rest, while I——"

Her eyes fell again, and the color stained her face a darker, richer crimson than before.

"Pray do not think that I am in any haste to leave such true friends as you and your mother have proved to me," she stammered confusedly. "Indeed, I shall never again be entirely happy if our friendship must end here and I do not see you again after we say good-bye in Paris. But—but you promised that we should visit the hotel where Lord Keith is stopping, Mr. Herndon, and if for no other reason than that I wish to put grandpapa out of his anxiety as soon as possible——"

"You are quite right," interposed Robert in a hushed voice—a voice out of which all the snap and vitality seemed to have suddenly disappeared. "Had we not better prepare to pay his lordship a visit at once, mother, dear?"

"Rather say, 'had we not better wait until his lordship is out of bed,'" returned Mrs. Herndon, laughingly. "Do have a little charity. Give his lordship a chance to finish out his morning nap, and please—*please* do give me an opportunity to wash the breakfast dishes and do my housework before you ask me to go out. Come, now, let me lead you up-stairs to my room, my dear, and if you

don't feel like sleeping, at least lie down and rest until it is time for us to go."

To this plan Inez offered no resistance, and gently winding one arm about her waist, Mrs. Herndon led her upstairs to her own neat little bed chamber.

It was some five or six minutes later when the widow came back to the dining-room and found Robert standing just where she had left him, and silently staring at the empty chair where Inez had sat at breakfast.

"Oh, mother, I thought she had forgotten," he said, gloomily, as the old lady approached him and laid her hand upon his arm. "She seemed so bright and happy that I thought the fancy had faded from her mind and would not again return."

"My poor boy! my poor boy! I am so sorry for you!" soothed Mrs. Herndon, gently. "I am afraid that that fancy will never leave her. She seems so sane upon all other points that I am afraid she is a monomaniac upon that subject; one cannot call her a lunatic, even though you did save her from a madhouse; and she talks so rationally even upon *that* that I am half tempted to believe that she really is sane."

"Sane, when she claims to be Lord Keith's betrothed, and he here with a wife?—here upon his wedding-tour!"

"He may have been false, Robert—false or fickle. The fact that he has married does not prove *her* insane."

"But his wife is the woman she claims to be, mother!" protested Robert. "He was here the very day I left for Fontainebleu—here to see me in reference to purchasing 'La Fleur de Foret'—and I had it from his own lips that he had married Miss Inez Catheron, the grandchild of Lord Glandore!"

"Robert!"

"It is true, mother—true! Besides, I saw the woman who is now his wife—saw her in Wales before Lord Keith married her—and she is as utterly unlike my poor darling as it is possible to conceive. Oh, mother, mother, if I cannot drive this fancy from her brain, what will life be like to me, when it is all bound up in *her*?"

"My poor boy—my poor, poor, Robert!" murmured Mrs. Herndon tearfully. "For your sake, dear, I hope and pray that you may break the spell of her singular hallucination. She is sleeping now; under the pretext of giving her a strengthening draught, I administered a few drops of chloral, and that, added to her exhausted condition, will keep her asleep for some hours. When she awakes, if the spell of her delusion be not too deeply cast, she may have forgotten the shadow which dims the young morning of my son's love."

"I hope so—I pray so with all my heart and soul!" responded Robert in a voice husky with emotion; but how vain were both the hope and prayer the noontide hour told him.

With the chiming of twelve o'clock, Miss Catheron's slumbers came to an end, and awaking to find Mrs. Herndon sitting beside her, her first words were:

"See, it is time for us to call upon Lord Keith now, dear Mrs. Herndon. Pray ask your son if we may not go at once."

With a sigh of vain regret, Margaret Herndon arose and bore the message to her son.

"Forgetfulness will not overcome the fancy, you see, mother," he said, with a dreary smile, "and our only hope is to shatter it by the shock of facing *him*. Do as she wishes, and let us call upon Lord Keith at once. Yet stop! Pray, impress one thing upon her mind. Since she does not wish to be thought the original of 'La Fleur de Foret,' it will be better for her to visit the hotel closely veiled, otherwise she will be subjected to the rude staring of people we may encounter! You can lend her a veil, to spare her this annoyance, I am sure; and while she is preparing herself for the journey, I will step out to secure a conveyance to take us to the hotel."

Then, taking up his hat, he strode out of the house, and went in quest of a fiacre.

It took him in all some twenty minutes to find one and drive back to the house, but scarcely had the vehicle paused before the villa ere the house door opened and closed softly, and Mrs. Herndon, accompanied by Inez—arrayed in the widow's best gown, and wearing, in addition, a bonnet and a thick, black veil—came down the steps, crossed the small courtyard, and joined him at the curb.

Without a word Robert alighted and assisted the two ladies to enter; then, bidding the driver to conduct them to the Hotel de Paris—which at that period was at the zenith of its glory—he stepped in after them, and the fiacre, swinging out into the roadway, clattered over the pavement and headed straight for the Boulevard des Capucines.

Scarcely a word was spoken during entire journey—for all three were busy with their own thoughts—and it was a positive relief when the fiacre halted at last before the white marble *facade* of the great hotel.

A trifle paler, but otherwise as calm as usual, Robert stepped out and assisted the two ladies to alight; then escorting them to the immense rectangular apartment,

which ran parallel with the office proper, he accosted a *garçon* and bade him ascertain at once if Lord Keith was enrolled among the guests of the hotel.

A minute or so later, the heavy curtains which shrouded the doorway to the office were thrust aside, and not the *garçon*, but one of the upper clerks, entered the sumptuous waiting-room.

"A thousand pardons, but monsieur makes inquiry relative to Lord Keith, the *garçon* tells me," he said politely as he advanced toward Robert.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the artist, rising from his seat, "but the inquiry need occasion no alarm, since it is merely a friendly interest which impels me to make it. Lord Keith neglected to leave me his address, monsieur—I am Robert Herndon, the American artist, and I merely wished to know if he was registered here?"

"He registered here, yes, Monsieur Herndon," responded the man with the utmost politeness. "But he is no longer among our guests. For some reason his lordship's party left this morning at daylight to catch the packet for Dover!"

A faint, startled cry broke from Inez's lips, and rising suddenly she clung to Robert's arm.

"Left for Dover?" she repeated in a strident voice. "Oh, monsieur, do you mean that he has returned to England? that he is not coming back here?"

"No, madame!" returned the clerk, "he is not coming back, for his effects were removed at the same time and notice sent to the office that he surrendered his apartments. It was very sudden, this resolution to return to England; in fact, his apartments had been engaged for the entire month of October, but it was due, I believe, to some whim of Lady Keith's, and——"

"Lady Keith!" gasped Inez, recoiling a step, and putting her hand to her heart as though some one had stabbed her. "Lady Keith, did you say? My Heaven, what jugglery is this? Who is Lady Keith? His lordship has no mother, monsieur, and——"

"Lady Keith is his lordship's *wife*, madame!" interrupted the clerk. "She and her friend Lady Blanche Hay were his *compagnons du voyage* this morning!"

There was no outcry—the shock was too great to admit of any—and dropping back into her seat speechless and nerveless, Miss Catheron let her hands fall limply at her sides, and sat there like a veiled image, so deathly still she was.

CHAPTER XLII.

“ADRIFT AS A LEAF IN THE STORM.”

FOR ten seconds there was utter silence in the room—the silence of a breathless anxiety upon the part of Robert and his mother—of undisguised wonder upon the part of the clerk, and of doubt, despair and wordless terror for the tortured woman upon whose head this crushing blow had fallen; then:

“Married!” she uttered in a faint, tremulous whisper. “Alaric married, and I—I——”

Something seemed to catch her throat, and choke away her voice; her hands moved freely one through the other, then shut with a sharp, spasmodic clutch, and after it:

“I will not believe!” she cried out in a dull, desolate voice. “The thing is impossible, and I will not believe it! There is some mistake—some cruel blunder—some terrible confusion of identity. The man who was here is an impostor! He is not Lord Keith—he cannot possibly be Lord Keith! There has been a mistake, I tell you—a dreadful mistake, and I—— Can I see the register, monsieur? Can I see the writing of the man who registered the names of Lord and Lady Keith at this hotel!”

“Certainly, madame, I will fetch the book here,” volunteered the clerk, who saw at a glance that there was something more in this than the mere friendly interest to which Robert had alluded, and who was therefore anxious to keep the affair from reaching the ears of the guests who were clustered about the office. “If madame will only remain calm for one moment, I will show her the book, and moreover, give her positive evidence that Lord Keith is no longer a guest at this hotel.”

With this he hurried out of the room—so great was his desire to prevent a scene and get the party out of the hotel as expeditiously as possible—and came back a few moments later bearing a ponderous volume in his arms; then depositing it upon a table, he began flirting over the leaves with eager haste.

“Look, madame, there is the signature!” he exclaimed, nervously, as he found the entry he sought and placed his finger upon it, “and, *pardieu!* if it be the one madame seeks, I can give the greatest proof the parties are no longer here!”

The latter part of the speech Inez scarcely heard.

Rising abruptly and hurrying to the table where the book lay, she bent over the written page and raised her veil just enough to distinguish the writing without exposing her face.

One fleeting glance—more was not necessary—then the veil dropped suddenly—her hands fell a dead weight—she staggered for a moment, walked dizzily and half blindly away from the table, and then reaching out her arms to Margaret Herndon, as though in the darkness of her soul she groped for some support:

“Take me away!” she gasped, in a sharp, jerky whisper. “Alaric wrote it—Alaric is married. Take me away—and let me think—think!”

Robert sprung quickly to her side, and his arm, moving suddenly, wrapped itself about her waist, and supported her fast expiring strength; then silently beckoning his mother to follow, he turned toward the street.

There was not a word spoken—in utter silence the clerk sprung forward and swung back the door, in utter silence they moved by him, and went out into the garish October sunlight, and in utter silence they sat through all the miserable moments that followed, as the fiacre clattered over the pavements of Paris, and whirled them back to the Rue des Angles.

With the solemnity of mourners just returning from having buried their dead, they alighted and passed into the house, and not until the last echo of the departing carriage had died away into the distance and was lost, did one word break the spell of that strange, unnatural stillness.

It was Robert who spoke it.

Catching sight of Miss Catheron's dead-white face as she mechanically removed her hat and dropped into a chair, he moved gently toward her and placed one tender hand upon her shoulder.

“My poor girl, don't take it so hard as this!” he said, very gently. “Is there nothing I can prove to you—how keenly I share your sorrow, and how truly we are your friends—my mother and I!”

She lifted her blank, bewildered eyes and stared at him in spiritless despair.

“Tell me if I am awake or dreaming?” she said in a dazed way. “It all seems so numb here—in my head—and so cold here, in my heart. Alaric is married—you heard what that man said, didn't you? Alaric Keath is married, and only four months ago he told me that life would be worthless to him without me. I can't make it out. It is so strange, so horrible, so unnatural. Did he make no effort to find me? Didn't he care what became of me that he forgot me so soon?—worse than forgot—*married* within four months after the time I was abducted? Married whom, I wonder? Married whom?—did you ever hear?”

"Have I not already told you!" responded Robert in a choking voice. "His wife was formerly Miss Inez Catheron, the granddaughter of Lord Glandore."

"But *I* am Inez Catheron, I tell you—I am Lord Glandore's grandchild. Will you never believe me, that you keep telling me this? Lord Keith has not married me, Mr. Herndon!"

"But Lord Keith has certainly married Miss Inez Catheron, my poor girl," protested Robert, quietly. "Only three days ago he told me that—told me here in this very room. Besides that, I saw Miss Catheron two years ago. She is small and dark, with hazel eyes and dusky hair, while you——"

She shrunk back from him with a faint, shuddering cry, and her eyes expanded with terror.

"Are you mad, or am I?" she uttered in a faint voice—a strange, unearthly voice. "Oh, Mr. Herndon, what hideous jugglery is there in all this? Surely I should know myself? Surely you will not have me believe that you think me insane! I am Inez Catheron, I tell you. I am Lord Glandore's granddaughter, and yet——"

"And yet Lord Glandore's granddaughter has never disappeared," he interrupted gently. "Dear child, do not let this strange hallucination prey upon your mind. Let me reason with you, and show you how impossible it is. If Miss Catheron, the great English heiress, had ever been spirited away the whole world would have rung with the intelligence—and nothing has been said regarding such a thing—nothing! Wait! Stop! Let me speak on. If Miss Catheron had been stolen from home, her grandfather would have moved heaven and earth to find her—and Lord Glandore has never searched for you! And again, if Miss Catheron had vanished, she could not have married Lord Alaric Keith upon the tenth of last August, while here—read it for yourself, my dear—here is the last edition of the *Court Journal*, which I purchased this morning when I went in search of the fiacre to convey us to the Hotel de Paris."

He took the paper from his pocket as he spoke, and unfolding it laid his finger upon a brief paragraph under the head of "Continental Gossip"—a paragraph which ran thus:

"Lord Alaric Keith, the lucky man who carried away the great matrimonial prize of the season upon the tenth of last August, passed through Greville last Tuesday on his way to Paris, with his charming bride. Lady Keith, who is one of the famous beauties of the day, will be a welcome addition to the list of lovely women at the gay

French capital, where, doubtless, some of the favored few recollect her as the great English heiress, Miss Inez Catheron, who paid a brief visit to Paris some two or three years ago in company with her aunt, the Countess of Elsdale!"

Straight through from beginning to ending, losing not a word, Miss Catheron read that brief paragraph, then, with a sudden piteous cry, she flung the paper from her and sprung to her feet.

"My Heaven! has all the world gone mad?" she cried out in a voice of misery and despair. "Lord Keith has *not* married me, I tell you, and I am Inez Catheron, I—I, and no other. I have not been changed, I have been stolen, but I am still myself, and if they were the last words I had to utter in this world, I would call Heaven to witness them and say:

"I am Inez Catheron, the heiress of Glandore!"

"But if Lord Glandore himself deny it, my poor child——"

"He will not deny it—he can't deny it!" she interrupted him, wildly. "Take me to him—let me see and speak with him personally and then be convinced!"

"No," responded Robert, who felt that it would be but a needless waste of money to throw it away upon a journey he was certain would be useless. "We cannot go to him, my poor girl, for it costs money to travel, and I am poor, indeed. But this I will do if it will satisfy you. I will write to Lord Glandore, and if you be indeed his grandchild, he will come and take you home."

"Oh, write at once, sir—write at once, then!" exclaimed Inez.

And having procured the necessary materials, Robert, without further hesitancy, sat down and wrote this:

"In the interest of one whose welfare is as dear to me as my life, I venture to intrude myself upon your notice, and to ask of you a favor, whose reward will be the consciousness that you have perhaps saved the reason of one human being, and brightened the life of yet another. I will not bore you sir, with a long preface, and, impertinent as you may deem the favor I wish to ask of you, I beg, I implore you to answer this letter with your own hand.

"One who is dear to me has, I believe, become possessed of a singular hallucination, and fancies, poor child, that your granddaughter, Miss Inez Catheron, has been abducted from home, and that you are crazed with anxiety regarding her fate. Will you not, for the sake of

doing a charitable action, tell her if this be true, and win the everlasting gratitude of

“Your humble servant,

“ROBERT HERNDON.”

Then followed the address to which a reply should be sent, and, having read the letter to Inez, Robert sealed and directed it, and then bade her don her bonnet and shawl.

“You shall post it with your own hands, to be sure that there is no mistake,” he said. “But, oh! dear heart, I beg of you be prepared to face the worst.”

“I am facing the worst now,” she answered. “Wait until grandpapa replies to your queer letter, and you will no longer doubt me like this!”

“God speed the answer!” he replied, as he led her out, and a few minutes later her own hands had stamped the letter and sent it on its way.

For three weary days she waited in an agony of suspense, which nothing, not even Mrs. Herndon's tender solicitude nor Robert's loving gentleness, could allay, and it was not until the morning of the fourth day that the longed-for answer came.

“It is grandpa's writing—it is grandpa's writing!” she cried, excitedly, as Robert put the letter in her hand. “Now you shall know how cruelly you have misjudged me, and how terribly you all have been mistaken. Read it, Mr. Herndon, read it aloud that we may all hear the happy news together.”

She passed the letter back to him, and, breaking the seal, Robert opened it and read this:

“DEAR SIR,—Your singular letter has just reached me, and, were not your sincerity so evident, pardon me if I say that I should treat it as the work of a madman. However, since you *are* in earnest, it will do no harm to answer this one request, after which I beg you will never allude to this matter again, as I do not desire to have the name of my granddaughter mixed up with rumors or ‘hallucinations’ of any shape. Regarding her I have only to say, in this connection, that she is now Lady Inez Keith, and, so far from having been ‘abducted,’ she returned to Glandore Court yesterday, in company with her husband and Lady Blanche Hay, and if your fanciful friend, or sweetheart——”

But beyond that Robert did not read, for then there came the interruption he had anticipated.

With a sudden scream of agony and despair Inez darted to his side, glanced at the letter, recognized the

writing, read for herself the words he had uttered, and then:

"Cast off! repudiated even by him!" she cried out, in a heartrending voice. "Oh, Heaven! what miracle is this? Has my life been all a dream, or is this madness coming on? God help me! God pity me! My life has gone astray!"

And there, with that broken cry, life and the world slipped away from her, a darkness fell upon her tortured brain, and Robert, springing forward, caught her as she fell, and, holding her in his powerful arms, bore her upstairs to the bed she was not to leave again for many weary days!

CHAPTER XLIII.

"UNMASK! UNMASK! THE TIME HAS COME!"

"My lady! my lady! pray, awake; I have a message for you—a message from Lord Keith!"

Startled into wakefulness by these words, accompanied as they were by the sound of some one rapping sharply upon her chamber door, Lady Blanche Hay sprung out of bed, lighted the gas, and threw a silken dressing-gown over her elaborate *robe de nuit*.

"What is wanted? Is it you, Delphine?" she breathlessly demanded, as she began to remove the fastenings of the door.

"It is I—yes, my lady!" responded Delphine, from the other side of the wooden barrier. "I have just received a message from Lord Keith's valet, and he desired me to report her ladyship's decision without an instant's delay."

"Her ladyship's *decision*!" Lady Blanche had by this time opened the door, and was now standing face to face with her maid. "What in the world are you talking about, you stupid goose? and what— Come in, do! I can't stand here all night in the draught from that hallway—what has Lady Keith's 'decision' to do with *me*, that you needs must drag me out of bed at half-past one o'clock in the morning."

"Ah, *mon Dieu*! it has much to do with your ladyship, otherwise I should not have disturbed you so soon after retiring," responded Delphine. "I have the trunks to pack without an instant's delay, my lady; Lord Keith has just sent word that we are to leave Paris at daylight, and return without delay to Glandore Court!"

"Leave Paris at daylight!" gasped her ladyship, growing pale with disappointment and anger. "To leave Paris, just when everything was going as I wished; to

leave Paris, just when *he*—— Oh, this is monstrous—this is too much to bear! To whose insane idea do we owe this sudden change in our plans, I should like to know?"

"It is Lady Keith's desire, so Henri says, my lady. She has taken a sudden notion to return to England, without an hour's delay; and, of course, his lordship honors her whim, even to leaving by the very first train. We are to start at half-past four o'clock, and there is barely time for me to pack your ladyship's trunks unless I begin at once. Shall I do so, Lady Blanche? His lordship sent word that as the hour of starting was very early, and you might not wish to sacrifice your night's rest, he should not feel slighted if you chose to wait until a later train, instead of accompanying——"

"I will go with them—I will go with them!" interrupted Lady Blanche, excitedly. "I am not such a fool as to let him slip through my fingers when I have so well begun to mold his thoughts to—— *Pardieu!* Why are you staring at me like that, you fool? Go! begin your packing at once and let me have as much sleep as I can. To leave Paris when all was working so well and my revenge might have been accomplished before another week had passed"—this to herself as Delphine closed the door and hurried away. "Oh, you shall pay for this whim, Zillah Keith! you shall pay for having blocked my game in this way—pay with added suffering, and that too as soon as my hate can bring down upon your head the bolt which destroys *his* happiness through yours!

"So you would fly from Paris, would you? before Gypsy Jock can discover your whereabouts and compromise you in your husband's eyes—you would escape the meshes of the net I have woven about you; undermine the barrier I am building between you and him, and screen yourself from all further peril by myteriously disappearing. It is a clever scheme, *Lady Zillah Keith*, but unfortunately for you, there is an unknown foe in the camp and she will find a way to spoil your little game—*thus!*"

As she spoke she slid the bolt into its socket, hastened away from the door, turned the gas still higher and once again resorted to her writing-tablet, sat down and penned a hasty message to her father.

* * * * *

In the same misty morning light which shone over the house-tops of the city when Robert Herndon and Inez Catheron steamed into the depot at Paris, the Keith party passed out of the gay French capital, and began the journey to England and Glandore; but it was not until they boarded the packet at Calais, and were rapidly leaving

the shores of La Belle France behind them, that Zillah's face lost the expression of agonizing terror, which it had borne ever since that startling affair in the *foyer* of the opera-house, or that she regained sufficient courage to remove the veil which she had worn ever since she left the hotel, and once more mingle with strangers without dreading the consequences.

From the moment they had boarded the vessel she had pleaded headache as an excuse for retiring to her state-room, and it was not until the Calais docks were a mile distant and the packet was buffeting the short, choppy waves of the English Channel, that she ventured to leave her retirement and join her husband and Lady Blanche on deck.

"Well, by George! this *is* a surprise, my darling!" exclaimed his lordship—"laughing all over his face"—as he looked up and caught sight of her. "Why, I thought that the 'chop' of the channel, aided by that wretched headache, would have given you a violent attack of *mal de mer*, and here you are looking a thousand per cent. better than when we first came aboard. Pray"—laughingly this—"what manner of creature are you, Lady Keith, that you defy all natural laws in this style, and come out of an attack of illness looking as though you had never endured an hour's sickness in your life? Upon my soul, sweetheart, if I hadn't seen you so pale and ill and wretched when you went below, I should believe you were afflicted with the imaginary ills of the fashionable world, or had 'put them on' for effect."

"How do you know but what I *did*?" she answered, with a laugh.

"How do I know that the sun is shining this minute?" he responded. "You are above deceit, even of the smallest and most trivial kind, my darling, and the knowledge of that would be sufficient to assure me of the truth, even though my own eyes had not seen the evidence of your suffering. To be a dissembler one must have a different face and a widely different record from the candid ex-Miss Catheron, my darling. Why, how pale you have grown again, Inez! What is the matter, dear? Your moods to-day seem as variable as April weather."

"It is nothing," she answered, with a faint, unsteady laugh. "Only the effect of the rocking of the vessel, Alaric. After all, you see, I *may* be verging upon *mal de mer*."

"You are certainly the most charmingly contradictory specimen of your very contradictory sex, my dear," he laughed in return. "When one looks for you to be sea-

sick, you remain undisturbed; and, when one begins to compliment you upon your powers of resistance, you switch around and become sea-sick. Did you ever see such a contrary creature, Lady Blanche?"

My lady's anger at being dragged out of Paris, just when her schemes were working so nicely, was in nowise appeased, and, in her angry vindictiveness, she could not resist the opportunity to administer one little stab to the woman who had caused her discomfiture.

"Inez is certainly a most contradictory creature," she sweetly said, "and it is well for her that she has married the least suspicious and least jealous man in the world, since she chooses to display her contradictory points at such peculiar times. Some men would be tempted to think it a tacit admission that deceit *had* been practiced if their wives choose to grow deathly pale at the time such a thing was mentioned—as our dear Inez did just now!"

Something like an electrical shock seemed to pass through Zillah's body, and, whirling sharply, she glanced into Lady Blanche's eyes, the color rising in one swift, red wave that stained her face from brow to chin, and, fading, left it white as pearl.

To her this direct allusion to a deceit which her ladyship had promised to aid her in hiding from the world, was too plainly an intentional act to be mistaken for an unconscious error, and, for the first time in her life, she caught a glimpse of the face behind the mask, and doubted the honesty of the woman she had thought her friend.

But with Lord Keith it was different, and, if my lady had hoped to give him a cue in that treacherous allusion to his wife's actions, she failed signally, for, having nothing but the most implicit confidence in the integrity of the woman he had married, he took Lady Blanche's remarks as a joke, and laughed the matter off.

"Ah, by George! I hadn't thought of that!" he said, good humoredly. "Better time your fits of sea-sickness to a less suspicious point in the conversation after this, Lady Keith, or the first thing you know I'll have a visit from the green-eyed monster, and the *Times* will come out with a sensational article, headed either 'A Tragedy in High Life,' or 'An Othello of the Nineteenth Century.' Only we haven't any deep-dyed villain to play the *role* of Iago, and compromise the fair Desdemona."

"But we have an *Emelia*, and she assisted Iago, you recollect!" returned Zillah, waving her hand toward Lady Blanche as she spoke, and trying hard to act as though she, too, treated the affair as a jest. "And

Emelia, you know, was even more treacherous than Iago, and her opportunities to create a tragedy were even better than his. If we produce "*Othello*" some time at Glandore Court, will *you* play *Emelia*, Lady *Blanche*?"

My lady realized that her impatient malice had lost her the blind allegiance of her blindest dupe—realized that she had betrayed herself by that one foolhardy act—and understood that this question was NOT a jesting one, but the earnest inquiry of a woman who understood her at last.

"If it will please you, yes, my dear," she sweetly answered, keeping her eyes fixed upon *Zillah*'s the while. "If you and Lord Keith will play *Desdemona* and *Othello*, I will promise to assume the *role* of *Emelia*, and between us we may get up a stirring sensation."

"'I'll not believe but *Desdemona*'s honest!'" quoted Lord Keith, folding his arms and striking a melo-dramatic attitude.

Then, with a sudden laugh:

"There!" he added, "that's all I know of the part, and that——"

"That is enough for you to know," interrupted *Zillah*, affecting a careless laugh. "You mustn't forget that portion of the *role*, *Alaric*, for much depends upon it. And now, if you don't mind telling *Martha Boggs* that I should like to have my rugs and steamer-chair brought up on deck, I'll be ever so much obliged to you, *Alaric*. The air is so fresh and bracing, I think I'll remain up here until we land at *Dover*."

"Mind it? Why, certainly not, my darling!" he answered. "Just make yourself as comfortable as you can upon the settee, and in a few moments I'll have everything arranged to suit you."

Then stopping but a moment to fold his own traveling-rug about her, he stalked away in the direction of the cabin, whistling as he went a fragment from last night's opera.

Zillah sat motionless and watched him go—her face as white as death, poor child, and her eyes filled with a troubled expression—then turning slowly as he passed from sight, she fixed a steady stare upon the smiling countenance of Lady *Blanche*.

For several seconds there was perfect silence between them as they sat and looked into each other's eyes, then:

"You had a purpose in doing that thing, had you not, Lady *Blanche Hay*?" she said in a slow, unsteady voice. "It could not have been accidental, for you deliberately called my husband's attention to a fact which he would

not otherwise have noticed, and I think you meant to do it. Didn't you?"

"I meant to do it; yes!" returned her ladyship, with smiling audacity. "Could you doubt it—could you be a woman and fail to understand it?"

"Then you deliberately planned to have my husband become suspicious of me?"

"I deliberately planned to have your husband become suspicious of you—yes, again, my dear!"

The last faint suggestion of color fluttered out of Lady Keith's face and left it chalky white from brow to chin; she sat a moment in deep silence, mechanically turning her wedding-ring and looking straight into the eyes of her enemy, then in a voice that sounded strange even to her own ears:

"I don't think I have understood you until now, Lady Blanche," she said. "Tell me—which are you? A friend or a foe?"

"A foe, I am afraid, my dear!" returned her ladyship, with bloodless composure. "You ask a straightforward question, and that, of course, calls for a straightforward answer. *Voilà!* you have it!"

Some fitful patches of color came and went on Zillah's face; she drew her breath in one wavering, indrawn sigh, and dropped back upon her seat.

"Will you tell me how long you have been this?" she said, after a momentary pause. "I think I can have done nothing since yesterday to change your feelings so completely, and— Am I right in imagining that you have been playing a part all along, Lady Blanche?"

"You are right in believing that—yes, once more, my dear!"

Zillah had opened her lips to ask yet another question, but at that moment she caught sight of Lord Keith returning with the steamer-chair, and she realized that the interview must end at once.

"When we reach Glandore Court I must see you in private, and learn what I am to expect at your hands, Lady Blanche," she said, hastily.

"Delighted to accommodate you, my dear *Lady Keith!*" returned her ladyship, with a sweet, derisive laugh. "It is time to unmask at last, I perceive, and let Glandore Court be the field of that charming operation."

"Here you are, my darling!" broke in Lord Keith at this juncture, as he strode forward, and, setting down the steamer-chair, proceeded to adjust it. "Boggs will be along presently with the rugs, and——"

"Thank you, but I don't think I care to remain on deck any longer," she interrupted. "We have only a short

time to continue on the vessel, and, as I am not feeling well, I think I will go back to my stateroom."

"Contradictions upon contradictions' head are piled!" exploded his lordship, in blank amazement. "In the name of all that is reasonable, Inez, what is the matter with you to-day?"

"I don't know—I can't tell—only—only that I want you with me, Alaric!" she answered, with a sob. "Please come below and *remain* there—please do, my husband. I am so weak, Alaric, so weak that I cannot stand, and—and I want you with me all the time."

Then, as he wound his arm about her and led her away, overstrained nature gave out; she reeled blindly, uttered one faint, wailing cry of misery and despair, and fainted in his arms.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"MARRY, BUT THOU'RT AN HONEST DEVIL."

THE swoon, however, was not of long duration, for scarcely had his lordship borne her into their private stateroom ere, to his unspeakable relief, her eyes opened to consciousness once more.

He did not distress her questioning the reason of her weakness—for he attributed it solely to the delicate condition of her health—and when she begged him to shut all others from the room and remain with her until they reached England, he was only too willing to humor her fancy, nor did he remark anything strange in the request, when upon landing at Dover, she again made it.

"I must not let him be alone with that woman?" she kept saying to herself. "I must keep him by me while I can, and keep him away from *her* as long as it is possible!"

That night they passed at the Lord Warden Hotel at Dover, and acting upon Zillah's request, Lord Keith and his wife supped in private, and in the morning (through an apparent whim of Zillah's), breakfast was ordered at least two hours before Lady Blanche had opened her eyes, so that a meeting between the two ladies was avoided, until the hour when the entire party took the train for London, from whence they were to journey to Leith.

And here again, Lady Blanche was made to see that she was not to have matters all her own way, for Lord Keith having (most opportunely for his wife) encountered at the hotel a Welsh curate and his daughter, whose acquaintance he had made during his sojourn in the Principality, and who were now traveling in the same direction as the Keith party, Zillah pretended to take such a fancy to the dowdy and insipid offspring of the equally insipid

Mr. Giles Evans, that she easily persuaded his lordship to invite them to share their private compartment, and having monopolized the young woman, and drawn her into conversation with Lord Keith and herself, left Lady Blanche no other alternative than to endure the moral platitudes of the Reverend Giles, and thereby be kept aloof during the entire journey.

In the cool twilight of the October evening the train reached the Leith Station, where the Glandore equipage awaited the arrival of his lordship and his bride, the old earl having been notified of their home-coming by a telegram sent that morning from Dover—and after taking a kindly adieu of the Reverend Giles and his daughter, who were to journey still further into Kent, Lord Keith and the two ladies left the train and entered the waiting vehicle.

It was quite dark when they finally reached Glandore Court, and not until she was again folded in the old earl's arms (in spite of his gouty foot he had insisted upon hobbling out to meet them), did Zillah feel anything like a sense of security.

"Bless me, my darling, you can't have found a union with your adorable Alaric such an earthly paradise as you anticipated, for you certainly look far from well, Inez!" exclaimed Lord Glandore, after the first happy confusion of greeting had passed and something like calmness was settling down upon the scene. "Keith, you rascal, is this the way you take care of my darling? Upon my word, she looks as pale and careworn as a charity scholar. No wonder you cut short your honeymoon if this is the result of it!"

"If you could have seen her two days ago, you'd have altered your opinion, I fancy," returned Lord Keith. "Lady Blanche will tell you that Inez looked as fresh and blooming as a rose when she arrived in Paris. But she was taken suddenly ill yesterday" (he was upon the point of confessing all about the picture and the meeting with Jock, but upon consideration decided that it would only wound Zillah afresh and make Lord Glandore indignant, and so abandoned the idea), "and since that time she seems to have 'run down' so terribly that she is little more than a ghost of what she was!"

"But I shall be all right now, grandpapa," hastily supplemented Zillah. "I only wanted to get back to you and dear Aunt Alicia. But let us talk no more of my looks; consider instead my feelings, and please have dinner served as speedily as possible. Alaric, do give yourself into Henri's hands without further delay, or you will never be dressed, and—shall I confess it?—I am alarmingly

hungry. I am going up-stairs to begin my toilet at once. Lady Blanche, your rooms are close to mine, will you not accompany me?"

"With pleasure, my dear," responded her ladyship sweetly, knowing full well what the invitation portended—but before she could say more:

"*Lady Blanche?*" repeated Lord Glandore with some surprise. "Aren't you getting remarkably formal all of a sudden, Inez? Or"—with a laugh—"have you and her ladyship had a falling out, my dear, that you are so particular about tacking on the title? It used to be '*Blanche*' alone before you left home."

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, grandpapa," responded Zillah with a flush and a rather unsteady laugh. "Alaric will tell you that I have developed a faculty for changing my mind in the most unaccountable ways of late, and of doing all manner of contradictory things."

"Yes, by George! I'll take an affidavit to that," acquiesced his lordship. "Only I never stopped to remark (until Lord Glandore called attention to it) that you have added the title to Lady Blanche's name whenever you have occasion to address her since we left Paris."

"Have you indeed noticed so much as that, oh, blind Othello?" laughed her ladyship, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Well—you recollect that I am to play Emelia, and it is part of Emelia's duty to draw suspicion upon Desdemona—well, if you watch close you may find some odder things than that to remark as the play progresses to its end."

Then fluttering by him, she walked after Zillah, who had already begun to mount the stairs.

Leading the way straight to her own boudoir, Lady Keith flung open the door, dismissed faithful old Martha Boggs, who was awaiting her coming, ushered Lady Blanche into the room, and then closing the door turned and faced her.

"I think you know why I have led you here, Lady Blanche Hay," she said, in a slightly nervous voice, as she lifted her eyes to the calmly insolent face of her companion; "but if you do not, it will do no harm to tell you that I mean to have a perfect understanding with the traitress, who, under the mask of friendship, tempted me to sin, and then, Judas-like, betrays her trust. I will not rest even one night beneath this roof, I will not wait even one hour before I know what I have to expect at your hands, and what motive you had for inventing this diabolical plot! Tell me what devil prompted you to play the *role* of Serpent in this second Eden, and for your own

base ends sacrifice a woman who trusted and believed you?"

"Quick curtain and loud applause from the gallery," supplemented Lady Blanche with a sweet, mocking laugh. "Bless me, how very dramatic, to be sure, my sweet, seraphic *Zillah the Gypsy*. Haven't you mistaken your vocation, my dearest? You ought to have adopted the stage, *Lady Keith*."

"No matter *what* I ought to have done, Lady Blanche; the worst mistake of my life seems to have been the belief that *you* were my friend—my worse folly, the idiotic idea that you were a woman, not a snake! No! do not trouble yourself to refute the evidence—heaven has set its mark upon you, and, being a serpent, no argument of yours can make you appear a dove. Speak, and speak quickly, if you please. I simply want to know what end you had in view when you tempted me to consent to this wicked imposture, and, having tempted me, must needs be vile enough to betray! What did I ever do to *you*, Lady Blanche Hay, that you invented this infamous plot to betray and ruin me?"

"*You*, my dear?—nothing!" repeated her ladyship, with insolent *sang froid*. "To be candid with you, I never had the slightest care *what* became of Zillah, the gypsy, so long as I reached through her the goal at which I aimed. You were my tool, sweetest—the cat's paw which raked my chestnuts from the fire, and those 'chestnuts' were called Inez Catheron and Alaric Keith. The former I hated, as only a woman can hate the rival who comes between her and the man she loved——"

"You love my husband?"

"Patience—patience! I put it in the past tense, recollect. I did not say the man I *love*, but the man I *loved*, my dear—loved, lost and learned to hate all in one short hour!"

"And that was Alaric Keith?"

"That was Alaric Keith—yes," responded her ladyship, with an intensity that made her voice hiss. "I loved him and he repulsed me—reviled me—left me, and manlike, thought I could forget. *Forget?* I arose from that spot with the spirit of a demon in my heart. I swore to have revenge—and I lent my whole life to the accomplishment of the task. When I learned that he loved Inez Catheron, I hated her because she had power to win what I had lost, and power to hold what I could never grasp; but, when I saw *you* and found you were her living counterpart—found that you, too, loved this man whose station is so far above yours as are the stars whose lamps shed luster on the

lowly earth below, then, and not *until* then, I knew what shape my vengeance was to take.

"I would remove Inez Catheron from his path and from mine, I told myself. I would give this man, who had spurned me, a wife who was born of gypsies—a wife whose origin would rack his soul with horror if he ever learned of it. I would give his name and his honor to the keeping of a vagabond—give his children a mother whose birth would be an everlasting shame to them and a never-ceasing curse to their father, and, when I had brought to him such suffering as he had brought to me, I would remove my mask, and say:

"'Keith, this is *my* work! Was it worth your while to spurn a woman who loved you?' This I have planned, and this I have accomplished. You were merely the instrument of my revenge, and your ultimate fate was nothing to me. I never wasted a thought upon you—never stopped to think whether I liked or *disliked* you, until I knew that he loved you, and loved you better than he had loved the woman whose place you filled by fraud!

"In the hour I realized that, I hated Zillah, the gypsy, as I had hated Inez Catheron, the heiress; and, in taking revenge upon him, it is doubly sweet to know that I shall also ruin the woman he loves! You are an impostor, and he will never forgive you; you are a gypsy, and the knowledge of it will fill him with horror and contempt, and the hour which brings your downfall will bring his ruin and the disgrace of the child you are yet to bear him. It is for his suffering and for his shame I am working, and all means are *good* means, so that they gain the end.

"I shall ruin you, *Lady* Keith, so that I may crush your husband! I shall make him suspect you—make him suffer a thousand agonies of doubt and fear, and, when I have torn his soul with such anguish as he tore mine, I shall denounce you for the thing you are, and blast his life beyond redemption! *He* trampled upon *my* heart, but now *his* is in *my* hands, and I will wring it *dry*, Lady Zillah Keith—wring it dry, and laugh at the ruin I have made!"

CHAPTER XLV.

"BUILT BY MY HANDS, IT FELL AND CRUSHED ME!"

No movement—no cry.

For one moment Zillah stood as though every fiber of her body had been changed to marble, so still she was, so deathly pale; then with a terrible calmness—a calmness born of that utter despair which crucifies hope, and

leaves, to the miserable, no path but a suicidal one—she walked slowly forward and looked straight into my lady's eyes.

"Your plan has one great merit—clearness!" she said, in a dull, dead voice, as coldly passionless as the falling of shattered ice. "You have omitted nothing that would tend to make me understand it, and nothing that would heap the last burning coal of your malice upon the head of the man you hate; but that man is my husband, and—do you think I will permit you to do this, Lady Blanche Hay?"

"Has any one *asked* you, my dear?" exclaimed her ladyship, with one of her queer, soundless laughs. "Poor witless fool! do *you* hope to prevent it? Do you think that you can upset a scheme laid by me, and by any act of yours save the man at whose ruin I am aiming?"

"*Yes!*" The words dropped from her lips, slowly, coldly, mechanically, as though she were an image endowed with the semblance of a human voice. "*Yes—Lady Blanche Hay; I believe I can do it; I know I can do it; for the hour that brings my ruin, brings your death, and you are not willing to die just yet.*"

"What do you mean, you poor fool?"

"I mean what I have said, Lady Blanche Hay!" returned Zillah, with that same terrible calmness. "If you are without pity for him and me, *I* shall be without mercy for the woman who wreaks our ruin. Break my heart and spoil my husband's life, if you dare, Lady Hay; for, to do it, you must face the consequences of your own acts, reap the harvest of your own crimes, and fall by the very sin with which you have built the foundation of this unholy scheme. To marry Lord Keith to a daughter of vagabonds, you have, on your own admission, conspired with others to remove Lord Glandore's granddaughter from your path, and whatsoever the laws of Romany vengeance may countenance, the laws of the United Kingdom do not sanction either abduction or murder. If Inez Catheron lived to-night, I would balk your vengeance by confessing the truth to my husband; and then, to save him from sin, put out the life which you have spoiled for me, and so save him from disgrace. But Inez Catheron does not live, for you were a party to her destruction—you and Marco, your father—and in the hour you betray me to my husband, or attempt to lift one finger to work out his ruin, in that hour I will turn queen's evidence, Lady Blanche Hay, and denounce you and your father as the murderers of Inez Catheron!"

My lady uttered a faint, startled cry and fell back a step, pale with baffled spite.

The crushed worm had turned, and turning found strength to sting!

"You did not reckon on this, I fancy, or you would not have shown your hand so soon!" resumed Zillah, in that same bleak, dispassionate voice. "But the woman who strikes a man through the wife who loves him, must remember that a power mightier than hers, has taught even the tigress to battle for her mate and perish in the defense of her young. And what the beast of the jungle do from instinct, the mate of a nobler animal, man, will emulate for love's sweet sake, and, dying under the lash, remember to the last the loyalty of the wife and the duty of the mother! Betray me to my husband—if you—dare, Lady Blanche Hay! for on the day you attempt it, on that day I will confess everything, and if it cost me my liberty forever, I will swear away your life and be content to know that you and your father have been hanged like dogs for the murder of Inez Catheron!"

For a moment my lady stood and looked at her in wrathful silence—realizing with a bitter sense of rage and chagrin, how completely the tables had been turned against her, and how utterly the game was blocked.

Blocked because she knew that Zillah had been driven to such a state of desperation, that, if she knew Inez Catheron still lived, she would confess the truth and destroy herself to save Lord Keith from disgrace, and believing her dead, would keep her word and denounce her foe as the daughter of a gypsy, and bring upon her imprisonment and social excommunication even though she could not really turn her over to the hangman's hands and fulfill her desperate threat.

Without waiting for her ladyship to reply, Zillah walked over to the door, and flinging it open, pointed to the hall.

"Our interview is at an end, Lady Blanche," she said, calmly. "I have listened to you, and you have listened to me, and there is therefore no reason to prolong this unpleasant affair. Will you have the kindness to leave this room—not for the time being, but forever? I shall not care to see you here again so long as you remain under this roof, and if you have ordinary intelligence, you will understand that you are no longer a welcome guest, and will make your visit to Glandore Court shorter by several months than the period for which you were originally invited. While you remain here, however—for the sake of my husband and the miserable secret your arts have forced me to keep from him—I must continue to appear, if no longer affectionate, at least friendly toward you, but the task will be such a bitterly irksome one, that common

decency will, I trust, prompt you to make it as brief as possible, and by relieving me from distress, save yourself from deadly peril!"

My lady shrugged her shoulders with an assumption of indifference, and walked toward the door.

On the threshold she paused and looked smilingly back.

"I don't mind confessing to you, that you are much sharper than I gave you credit for being, my dearest," she sweetly said. "But at the same time, don't let conceit run away with you, and don't fall into the error of believing that my father and I are the only ones in danger so far as the removal of a certain party is concerned. If it is to be denounced as a conspiracy, kindly recollect that it was a conspiracy of *three*, my dear, and that you are one of the trio. You did nothing in ignorance, my seraphic saint; you knew that the missing woman was to be removed, and you consented to fill her place without being forced. Turn about is fair play, the whole world over, you know, so if I dare not act, please to recollect that you dare not speak—unless"—this with a slow, mocking laugh—"you are willing to share part of our punishment, and in addition, to win the loathing and disgust of the man you have married. Take a fool's advice, dear Lady Keith, and keep your tongue behind your teeth, for there is just a possibility that in denouncing me you may destroy yourself. Good-evening, sweet pet. I should like to throw vitriol in that pretty, white face of yours if I dared, for I don't mind telling you that I hate you worse than I hated the woman whose place you have usurped; and it would give me the greatest pleasure in the world to see you lying dead at my feet this very instant."

Bowing herself out of the room, her face aglow with sweetest smiles, she closed the door and fluttered softly away in the direction of her own apartments.

Once inside of them, however, her first act was to throw a hand mirror at Delphine, and order her to leave the room as expeditiously as possible; and this accomplished, she bolted the door and once again laid eager hands upon her writing-tablet.

"Ten thousand curses upon her!" she uttered in a voice of suppressed fury, apostrophizing, of course, the woman from whose presence she had just been ordered. "Ten thousand curses on her, and ten thousand more upon my own bad temper which prompted me to betray myself too soon, and show my hand before the game was won. That puling, love-sick fool is shrewder than I imagined; but even so, not shrewd enough to break a lance with Maggie Talford and cheat her of her sweet revenge. I dare no

longer do anything openly—I dare no longer fight the battle myself—but all is not yet lost, and thus I'll prove it!"

Then driving the pen into the ink, she leaned over her tablet and wrote:

"DEAR FATHER,—At all hazards have Jock come to Glandore Court within a fortnight, no matter what ruse you employ to get him here. Zillah has found out my game and determined to block it. I send you a blank check—fill it out for whatever sum you may need; but if it takes every shilling I have in the world, send Jock here, or our revenge is lost.
MAGGIE."

CHAPTER XLVI.

"SOMETHING NOT DOWN ON THE BILLS."

THE tinkling of the dinner-bell brought Lady Blanche Hay fluttering down-stairs, whither Lord Keith had already preceded her, and where she found him chatting gayly with the old earl and Lady Elsdale.

Zillah, however, was not present, nor did she join them even after they filed into the dining-room and took their places around the table, and inquiry regarding the cause of her absence acquainted my lady with the fact that Lady Keith had pleaded headache as an excuse for absenting herself, and had ordered dinner served in her own room.

"She is upset by our little interview!" thought my lady as she received this piece of intelligence. "It was a trifle too much for her nerves, and she hasn't the courage to face me so soon after the 'passage at arms!' Have a care my lady! have a care! It is the cool head that wins in such a game as this, and you are scarcely a match for me! If you will only keep on being weak and nervous, and remain in your room for two or three days, I shall make good progress in the work of undermining the happiness of your devoted Alaric. I want to be alone with him as much as possible; I want to drop an occasional seed in the soil, and help it to grow by tender nursing, and I can only do it while you are out of sight and hearing!"

But, as though Zillah was thoroughly cognizant of this amiable intention of her ladyship's, dinner was no sooner over than Martha Boggs carried a message to Lord Keith, asking him to come and read to his wife, and, bidding everybody good-night, he hurried away and left her ladyship to spend a dull evening with the old earl and his sister.

Not that it was a customary thing for an evening to be dull when spent with these two, for Lady Elsdale was a brilliant conversationalist at all times, and, as a general

rule, Lord Glandore was a host in himself, so numerous were his anecdotes, so witty his stock of small talk, and so sunny his disposition; and, although he had apparently been in the best of spirits in the earlier part of the evening, for some unaccountable reason he had suddenly become gloomy and abstracted, and took but little interest in the conversation.

This sudden change had occurred just after Lord Keith had wished them all good-night and gone up-stairs in obedience to his wife's summons, and my lady could ascribe no reason for it, other than that the evening mail—which the footman had carried in at that period—had brought him some bad news, for after excusing himself and retiring in the best of humors to the library for the purpose of looking over his letters, the old earl had returned after half an hour's absence in this singularly altered condition.

At half-past ten Countess of Elsdale had given the signal for retiring, and set the example by preceding her ladyship up-stairs, her ladyship had started to follow, but midway up the staircase had suddenly recollected removing a diamond arrow from her throat for the purpose of casting aside the scarf she wore, and which the heat of the wood-fire rendered uncomfortable, and hastening back to the drawing-room for the purpose of securing the jewel, which she remembered having placed upon the table beside her chair, she was not a little surprised upon entering to find the old earl leaning forward in his seat beside the fireplace with an open letter in his hand, and giving unmistakable signs of wrath and indignation by his flushed face and his stormy mutterings.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed her ladyship, in a truly American fashion, as she arched her dark brows, and smiled at him. "Are you studying for the tragic stage, Lord Glandore, or are you rehearsing the *role* of 'stern parent' for somebody's private theatricals! Why, you look positively murderous!"

"Then my looks don't belie me, for I assure you that I feel positively murderous, Lady Blanche!" responded his lordship, with a deep, double-bass growl that made her ladyship grab up the missing jewel with laughing haste, and aver that "she had better escape before the desire was indulged at her expense."

"For," said she, laughingly, "Shakespeare bemoans the fact that 'how oft the means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done,' and if you are murderously inclined I may save myself from being slaughtered by taking refuge in flight!"

"No, don't go yet; I want to speak to you, Lady

Blanche," interposed his lordship, quickly. "I'm in a quandary over this infernal letter, and probably you will advise me what course to pursue regarding it. I don't care to mention the affair to Inez, because I'm afraid it will annoy and distress her unnecessarily. I'm not sure whether I ought or ought not to say anything about it to Lord Keith; and, on the other hand, I can't confide in Lady Elsdale, simply because Alicia never *could* keep a secret from Inez, and if I tell *her*—well, I might as well tell Lady Keith myself, and have done with it."

"Dear me! Is it such a weighty matter, then, that absolute secrecy is required?" twittered her ladyship, as she turned back from the door and advanced toward him.

"It's the most outrageous thing in the world!" blurted his lordship, angrily. "I don't know what under the sun the fellow is driving at, or whether the whole thing is a hoax or not; but one thing is certain, I won't have my granddaughter's name mixed up with any such low-lived hodge-podge as this, and—— Look at this letter, Lady Blanche. It came in the evening mail—came from Paris, and is written by some confounded chap who signs himself—what is it now? Let me see"—flirting over the letter, and glancing at the last page. "Ah, yes, Herndon—that's it—Robert Herndon."

"Robert Herndon!"

My lady had reached forth her hand to take the letter, but as she pronounced that name the outstretched member fell, she started back a step, and looked at Lord Glandore with wide, startled eyes.

"Yes, Robert Herndon!" repeated the old earl. "But the name seems to affect you. Do you know this fellow, Lady Blanche?"

"Yes—no!—that is—I—I have heard of him," stammered her ladyship, confusedly. "He is an American artist, who has just painted a picture which has created a positive furor in Paris, and—and what does *he* say of Inez, Lord Glandore?"

"Here is the letter; take it and read for yourself," he answered, as he put the letter into her hands. "I answered it as soon as received, and that answer you shall read before it goes into the mail-bag."

My lady made no reply. With bated breath and dilated eyes, she was already reading the letter, and scarcely heard his final words.

From the beginning to the end, omitting not one word, she read Robert Herndon's inquiry; and when at length she finished its perusal, her lips were tightly compressed

and her whole face so ghastly, that Lord Glandore was startled by its unearthly expression.

"I do not think that Mr. Robert Herndon ever wrote this letter, Lord Glandore!" she gasped, in a voice that would waver and sound strained and unnatural in spite of her. "In fact, I may say, that I am *sure* he did not, for this writing is not his. I—I have seen letters from him often, and—and the chirography was not in the least like this. It is a forgery—a cruel hoax, I fear—perpetrated by some malicious practical joker, and you have done well not to show it to Lord Keith, nor yet to mention it to Inez. But you will answer it, of course, and answer it so secretly that——"

"I *have* answered it," interrupted the earl; "the reply is in the library. "Would you like to see it, Lady Blanche."

"Yes," she answered, in a dull, lifeless voice. "Yes, I should like to see it very much indeed."

"Wait a moment and I'll fetch it then," returned the earl, but before he could put the project into execution, my lady's quick wits had planned a scheme, and she set about perfecting it.

"No, let me go for it!" she said. "It must be torture for you to walk with that gouty foot, and I am free from pain. Tell me where the letter is and I will fetch it to you, Lord Glandore."

"It is in one of the pigeon holes of my desk—here are the keys, Lady Blanche. But really this is asking too much and——"

"It isn't the slightest bit of trouble, and it will save you pain. Sit where you are and I will return presently," she laughed, as she took the keys from his hand and fluttered out of the room; but once in the hallway all her forced merriment dropped away from her like a discarded mantle.

"This letter—I must have this letter," she muttered, glancing down at Robert Herndon's missive which she still held. "I must persuade the earl to keep its existence a secret from everybody but ourselves, and then—— My Heaven—my Heaven! can fate have thrown Inez Catheron into that artist's path? Can it be possible that she has escaped from the madhouse, and that the rascally keeper has refrained from notifying us of it in order to get all the money he can before we discover that she has slipped out of his clutches? Escaped? Oh, impossible when, as father told me, she was so closely guarded.

"No—no, Inez has not escaped! Had she done so, she would have found means to come here, not to wander to the home of an insane artist who was a stranger to her,

and ask him to write to Lord Glandore and inquire what had become of her. I have been frightened by a mere accident—startled over something which cannot harm me, and now, if I only play my cards well, the game is in my hands!”

She had by this time entered the library, and reached the earl's desk, and having unlocked it, she proceeded—not to look for Lord Glandore's letter, but for a sheet of blank paper which might correspond in appearance with the missive she held in her hand.

She had little difficulty in finding one; then, having folded it to the proper size, she slid it into the envelope addressed by Robert Herndon, secreted his letter in the folds of her gown, and then proceeded to search for Lord Glandore's reply.

That, too, was soon found, and, having paused a moment to restore to order the papers which she had disarranged, she locked the desk and went back to the old earl.

“Read it, my dear Lady Blanche—read it. The envelope is still unsealed!” exclaimed his lordship, as she gave the letter into his hands, and, obeying the injunction, my lady drew forth the written sheet, and cast her eyes over the words which afterward caused Inez Catheron so much misery.

“It is a sensible reply—sensibly written, Lord Glandore,” she smiled, as she restored it to the envelope and gave it back to him. “However far this audacious, practical joker may have meant to carry this hoax, I fancy he will desist when he receives a reply which must certainly prove to him that further endeavors will not be noticed.”

“What makes you think that it is the work of a practical joker, Lady Blanche?”

“Because, as I have told you, the letter is a forgery, and Robert Herndon never wrote it!” responded her ladyship, dropping her eyes and making a very passable show of modest confusion. “Will you promise to keep a secret, if I tell you something, Lord Glandore? You remarked how much I was affected by the mention of Mr. Herndon's name, and—and you have also heard me say that I know enough of his writing to detect the forgery of this letter—and shall I leave you to guess the rest, or must I tell it plainly? I am betrothed to Mr. Herndon, Lord Glandore, and—you will keep the secret, I am sure—a woman may reasonably be supposed to know something of the handwriting of the man she has promised to marry.”

“Bless my stars! what an astonishing surprise!” exploded the old man. “Dear Lady Blanche, allow me to

congratulate you, and to envy the happy man. What's that? Keep it a secret? Most assuredly, I promise not to tell another living soul. As you say, the thing must be a hoax, and I am glad that I mentioned it to you."

"Such a hoax that we can afford to destroy the joker's plans and dismiss him this way!" exclaimed her ladyship, as she tore the envelope containing the blank sheet of paper and tossed both pieces into the fire. "That is the first and last communication we shall ever receive from *that* party, I imagine, for your reply will put a damper upon his ardor. But if I were in your place, Lord Glandore, I shouldn't mention the affair at all. In the first place, it would only distress dear Inez; in the second, it might make Lord Keith furiously angry; and in the third, *I should have* to confess anew how I detected the forgery, and that would involve a disclosure of my betrothal to Mr. Herndon, before I wish to have it known. The better plan will be to keep the matter a secret between ourselves. It hurts no one by keepinng silent, and to speak would only cause an unnecessary annoyance to Inez and Lord Keith."

"Quite right, my dear Lady Blanche—so it would!" returned his lordship. "I'll just drop this letter into the mail-bag, and then say no more about the occurence. We'll be mutual secret-holders, my dear. I'll guard yours and you'll keep mine."

"To the death!" responded Lady Blanche, striking a mock tragic attitude, and speaking in a melo-dramatic voice; then breaking into a babble of silvery laughter, she bade him good-night, waved him adieu with her tiny, jeweled hand, and fluttered out of the room.

"A gem of a woman—a very Kohinoor of a woman!" exploded, admiringly, the old earl, as he rang for his valet to assist him in retiring. "Egad! but that Herndon is to be envied—the lucky dog!"

But could my lord have stepped outside and glanced upstairs a moment after he made that assertion, what a change would have come over the spirit of his dream! For there on the first landing stood my lady, with Robert Herndon's letter in her hand, her eyes turned toward Lord Keith's door, and her face aflame with the passion of an incarnate demon.

"My vengeance is sure at last, Keith!" she said through her shut teeth. "I have the means to prove to you that you are a deceived man—the means to prove that Lord Glandore himself was a party to the deception, and not my hand but Gypsy Jock's shall strike the blow which shatters all your peace. A heart for a heart, and a life for a life, my lord. It was a bad blunder when you made an

enemy of Mark Talford's daughter and changed her love to hate."

For one moment silence followed her going; then the soft clicking of her door told that she had passed into her own room, and then:

Something came out of the shadow where the wing passage merged into the main hall—something garbed, like herself, in the raiment of a woman—something that moved and walked as noiselessly as she—came and advanced to the head of the staircase where the light from the newel-branch struck up and touched her ghastly-drawn face, and so revealed the features of Martha Boggs.

"Mark Talford's daughter!" she repeated thrice, in a startled whisper, so faint with terror that it scarcely broke the silence. "I allers said as her face looked like some other as I'd seen; and now I know—now I know! She's Hulda Talford's granddaughter growed up—Hulda Talford as stole and killed t~~he~~*—the other one* what I promised Lady Morford never to say nuthin' about. It's Maggie Talford, and she's here to finish the work as her ma and her grandmother begun. Oh, my lork, my lork! what am I to do? I—I daresn't speak—I daresn't tell nobody nuthin' about the *two* babbies, but—I'll watch that woman as long as she stays in this house, and afore she shall harm my sweet lamb, I'll—I'll crawl on her in the dark and 'chuck' her down the stairs. Maggie Talford's darter—Maggie Talford's darter at Glandore Court! My head, my head! how it do be spinnin' 'round."

CHAPTER XLVII.

MY LORD AND MY LADY.

IN some respects my lady's wish was gratified, for when the morrow came, Zillah—to whose nervous system that memorable interview had been a dreadful shock—was so prostrated that Lord Keith deemed it advisable to call in a doctor, who at once prescribed perfect rest and quiet, and forbade his patient leaving her bed for several days.

"It is nothing very serious, your lordship," he said, in answer to Lord Keith's eager inquiry regarding the cause of his wife's sudden and singular illness. "I fancy that something must have shocked or troubled her, and in the delicate condition of her health, it is only natural that she should succumb to the strain. The best remedy is rest for the body and quiet for the mind. Humor her if she becomes at all fanciful, and I have no doubt that she will soon be herself again."

But here, as in many other instances, medical opinion was at fault; for, far from improving, Zillah seemed to be

growing weaker day by day; she took to brooding over her sorrowful position, and regretting so sincerely her part in the scheme against Inez Catheron, that she fell an easy prey to a nervous fever which confined her to her room for several weeks.

So that my lady, as you see, had her wish gratified in that respect.

In obedience to the letter she had dispatched him upon her return to Glandore Court, Marco had hastened to bring Gypsy Jock to Leith—ostensibly to aid him in some work connected with the Romany tribes—and both were now quartered at an out-of-the-way tavern, awaiting such time as Zillah should be able to leave her chamber, and my lady give the signal for action.

It was not until the second day in December that the former event came to pass and Zillah, looking as pale as a lily, came down for the first time since her return to Glandore Court, and took her place at the family table, and it was not until three days later, that the latter occurred, and my lady after long waiting gave the signal to strike.

Stealing out in the dim light of the early morning, she had met her father under the oaks by the east wicket where Inez Catheron had been trapped, and there concocted her plans to ruin Inez Catheron's sister.

"I shall never confess anything in regard to their relationship," she had said in answer to Marco's inquiry, "I shall simply crush Lord Keith with the belief that Zillah is false to him, then, after I have separated them, I shall quietly disappear, send him a letter, telling him that the real Inez Catheron was killed by an accident, that I substituted a gypsy in her place and that she was, in addition to being an unfaithful wife, the daughter of vagabonds and lower by far than any bar-maid in the country. Ah! it will be a noble revenge, will it not, father? You must not forget the time and the place, and you must be near to drag Jock away as soon as he makes the discovery. Remember! the rear door of the conservatory at nine o'clock to-night."

"I will remember," Marco had answered, and then, with a few final words of advice, my lady had stolen back to the house, and left him to return to the tavern, where Gypsy Jock—poor, unsuspecting tool of the schemers!—still slept in his little room under the moldy eaves.

* * * * *

At six o'clock that night the whole party assembled in the drawing-room, for the purpose of enjoying a chat while waiting for dinner to be announced, and, although Lady Blanche was in the best of spirits, and Zillah—who

had begun to believe that her foe was disarmed, since she showed no inclination to battle with her—appeared calmer and more like herself than at any time since her return home, it was yet noticeable that she never, by any chance, addressed her remarks to Lady Blanche, and that Lady Blanche “froze,” and became stiff and sedate, whenever she was forced to come in contact with either Lord Glandore or his granddaughter.

But what annoyed and mystified Lord Keith more than aught else was the fact that several times, upon glancing up, he found her ladyship's eyes fixed upon him with an unmistakable expression of *pity*.

“Confound the woman! what the deuce is she pitying me for?” muttered his lordship, with more earnestness than grammar, after this state of affairs had been in force for something like a couple of hours. “I’ll make it my business to ask her the meaning of all this as soon as I get an opportunity.”

But my lady didn’t mean that he should have an opportunity until it suited her, for she engaged herself in close conversation with Lady Elsdale until she saw by the clock that it wanted but a quarter of nine, then, knowing by woman’s unerring instinct, that his lordship was on thorns to speak with her, and would be sure to follow if she left the room, she excused herself upon the pretext of getting a shawl, and walked out into the corridor.

She had scarcely gone a dozen steps before Lord Keith was at her side.

“Pardon me, Lady Blanche,” he said, a trifle stiffly, “but will you accord me the privilege of a few moments’ private conversation? The library is convenient, and I will not detain you long.”

My lady’s only response was to gravely bow her head and pass into the apartment designated, and following her, his lordship closed the door and turned up the light.

“I wish to ask you,” he began at once, “what has caused the rupture between you and Inez and— No! do not deny its existence, I pray you, for it is only too evident that my wife and my friend have had a falling out of some sort. Not that alone, but that some shadow has come between you and Lord Glandore, for your conduct toward him to-night has been marked by the strangest restraint, and toward me by a resemblance of—pity! I will be frank with you, Lady Blanche, and tell you that I am not a man who cares to be pitied under any circumstances, and still less when there is no apparent cause for it. Will you tell me, then, the key to your singular conduct, and relieve me from this surprise and distress?”

My lady lifted her eyes slowly—lifted them with such a

look of pity and sorrow that he felt the blood mount to his face—then, in a twinkling, she seemed to freeze, and with a dignified bow turned toward the door.

"I will relieve you of the distress—yes, Lord Keith," she said, "but not in the way you wish. Whatever else I may do, I shall not turn traitress to a woman I *once* respected." (Oh, the cunning stab in that bit of emphasis.) "Nor shall I repay your generous friendship to me by pursuing a subject which can only give you pain. I will relieve the distress by removing the cause, Lord Keith, as I had already resolved to do."

"Which means——"

"That I shall take my departure from Glandore Court within the next ten days—sooner if I am fortunate enough to arrange with my agent to procure me a house which I can rent at once, and where I can establish for myself a temporary home."

"But you accepted an invitation to stay here for one year, Lady Blanche, and now——"

"Stay here!" interrupted her ladyship, exploding with apparent indignation. "Do you think I could do it after what I discovered to-day? Do you think I could stay here and see my best, my truest friend hourly duped by those he trusted? Do you think I could remain here and respect these people who have wrought your dishonor and—— Oh, what have I said?"—in a voice of sudden agony and remorse. "Forget it, my lord, forget it and let me go!"

Her hand reached out toward the knob of the door, but with two swift strides, my lord came between her and it, and his face—paler than any living face she had ever seen—looked into hers, with a stare that made her heart beat fast.

"You cannot go until you explain that remark!" he said, hoarsely. "For God's sake, what manner of woman *are* you, after all? I thought you my friend—*her* friend—and now you speak of her home—my wife's home—as a place where her husband is being *dishonored*! I will not suffer you to sheath your dagger in velvet—you shall stab me with the bare steel, if you stab at all, Lady Hay, and you shall explain to me, *now* and *here*, the nature of your quarrel with Lady Keith—a quarrel which has made you vindictive enough to aim at her the deadliest insult the head can conceive or the lips utter!"

"Oh, my lord, my lord!"—with a sorrowful reproach in voice and eyes. "Is it possible that you can suspect me of such baseness as that?"

"It is the duty of every man to suspect the being who reviles his wife and impeaches her honor as you have

done!" he answered frigidly. "You call yourself my friend, forgetting that we two are one, forgetting that in me, you speak to her, in her, you slander me—arraign yourself before the husband and expect that he will listen and believe you when you attack the honor of his wife! If you have no shame for yourself, have shame for *me*, in that I appear so low in your eyes that you could believe I would listen to your slanders and give credence to your treacherous lies!"

"Lies!" My lady drew herself up with an assumption of imperial dignity. "My lord, you forget yourself."

"Perhaps!" he answered coldly. "It is only natural when I remember *her* and listen to you!"

"One moment," interrupted my lady, seeing that she could manage him better by returning to the "sweet humility dodge." "One moment, my lord. Let us remember that I'm a woman, and you a man, and no man who deserves the title will insult a woman and accuse her of such infamy as you have laid at her door, with no further warrant of the unjust act, than that she comes to him as a friend with *proof* of what she says!"

"Proof!" exclaimed his lordship indignantly. "Proof of my wife's baseness, Lady Hay?"

"Have I said *that*?"—meekly—"have I as yet made any charge against *her*? Answer me honestly, Lord Keith—have I uttered one word against your wife?"

"N-no!" he stammered, flushing and then paling again. "No, you have not done that, but——"

"But you have insulted me, reviled me, accused me of all infamy—not knowing—not caring to hear that this day I have discovered the pit into which you have fallen. You have placed me in an unenviable position, my lord, for you have forced me to clear myself at the expense of those I would save. If I have done a wrong thing in reading a letter never meant for me, at least believe that I was honorable enough to prefer leaving this house without divulging its contents, nor would I have dreamed of doing so had not you forced the step upon me by your uncharitable remarks. My lord, I *am* your friend, and if I prove it I must ask in return that you give me a friend's pledge to a friend, and whatever comes of this miserable *expose*, refrain from mentioning my name in connection with it—I came here respecting Miss Catheron and honoring her grandfather; if I leave, condemning Lord Glandore for sacrificing my friend, you must believe that I have just cause for it, for the proof of my honesty is in my hands at this moment.

"By accident to-day I found this letter—lying crumpled in a ball at the end of the hallway"—taking it from her

bosom and smoothing it out as she spoke. "Perhaps you will condemn me for reading it—I own that it was wrong—but what I saw in the first glance tempted me to read it to the end as it will, perhaps, tempt you in turn. But before I give it you, my lord, answer me one question. Has Lord Glandore ever told you that the man who painted 'La Fleur de Foret——'?"

"You mean Robert Herndon, the American artist?"

"Yes, the insane painter who reproduced your wife's face as perfectly as though she sat as his model," returned her ladyship. "Has Lord Glandore ever told you that that man wrote him a letter, inquiring about your wife's present whereabouts, and hinting that there was some mysterious affair in which her name was mixed?"

"Never!" returned his lordship, with increasing agitation.

"It would seem strange to you, would it not, if he received such a letter from the man who painted that remarkable picture, and never mentioned the fact to you? There could be no reason for his silence upon such an important point to you, the party most interested: it would look suspicious if such inquiry had been made five weeks ago, and not a word of the fact mentioned to the husband of the woman whose name was concerned with the affair. If there were nothing back of it save the driveling of an insane artist there could be no reason for concealment, and to keep it secret suggests—— What? My lord, judge for yourself. There is the letter I found this morning. Read it, and when you have heard my story, ask yourself if I have not been shamefully duped, and that the Earl of Glandore is a party to the deception practiced upon you?"

Speaking, she put the stolen letter into his hand, and, turning the key in the door, stood and watched him while he read.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"A THREAD OF CANDOR IN A WEB OF LIES."

FOR at least a minute there was absolute silence, then his lordship lifted his pale face and looked at her.

"I see no evidence of guilt in this," he said. "Herndon is insane, as I have already told you. He has doubtless heard from somebody that Lady Keith resembles his painting, and the result is the figment of his diseased brain. There is nothing of a condemnatory character in this letter, Lady Blanche."

"True," she answered; "and that fact makes it all the

more remarkable that Lord Glandore should have refrained from mentioning it to you, unless there was something to be covered up—something to which this letter would have given a clew. So innocent a thing would not have been hidden so closely unless the gypsy's story is true."

"The gypsy's story!" My lord's face blanched as he spoke, and he moistened his dry lips with the tip of his tongue. "What do you mean, Lady Blanche? What has any gypsy to do with this affair? For God's sake! what are you driving at? Do you know something which has any bearing upon this affair? You say you are my friend—then prove it by speaking out before you drive me to distraction by beating about the bush in this uncertain way!"

My lady walked forward and gently laid her hand upon his arm.

"My lord," she said, in a trembling voice—"my lord, the man who addressed Inez at the opera-house that night is here—in Leith—here searching for her, and I have seen him!"

His lordship started, but made no reply.

"Yes, I have seen him!" continued Lady Blanche. "But up to this day I have never believed that his words held one grain of truth, although the words Inez uttered in her sleep were indeed strange. It was after we had returned from the Paris *salon*, and while you had gone to search for Robert Herndon, that she dropped asleep—worn out, no doubt, by the exciting experience at the *salon*; and having nothing else to occupy my mind, I took up a book and sat near her to read. She was very restless, and began to murmur in her sleep. I took no notice of it; but presently she cried out in a voice of agony and shame:

"'Jock! Jock! don't betray me! I did love you in those days, but I couldn't help it if I outlived it and found a greater love. Don't betray me—for God's sake don't betray me, and I'll make you rich—rich!'"

"I awakened her at once, and told her what she had said. She laughed it off, saying that the picture had impressed itself upon her mind, and she had been dreaming of gypsies.

"I thought no more about it until that affair at the opera, and you remember that I told you then that it was odd that the man who addressed her should be a gypsy and so like the man who stood beside the girl in the picture. Still, I had no thought that it was anything more than a mere coincidence, but when I mentioned the affair to Inez—I did that when we were on shipboard,

and while you had gone for her rugs and steamer-chair, Lord Keith—she seemed to grow angry at my words, told me ‘that she hated people who were eternally prying,’ and from that moment began to treat me coolly—even calling me Lady Blanche whenever she was forced to address me.

“Five weeks ago we entered this house, and one morning, two days after our arrival, when I went out to take a stroll before breakfast, upon reaching the cross-roads I found myself standing face to face with the gypsy flower-vender who created the disturbance at the Paris opera-house.

“He recognized me in an instant, and in a wild, excited way began to question me regarding Inez. I told him that I knew nothing about her whereabouts—indeed, that I was not one of your party, but that my carriage had failed to come to take me home from the opera, and you, taking pity upon my embarrassing position, had offered to share yours with me and drop me at my own abode. Upon this he launched forth into his terrible story, and declared that she had been—well, not exactly his wife, but his companion in their old gypsy days. Told me that she was not a gypsy by birth, but had become one from choice, and for two years had led a double life of the most remarkable description.

“He said he had met her while she was at school in Paris, where she was known to be a great heiress, that she had become fascinated with him and, under promise that he would not try to discover her real identity nor question her goings and comings, fled with him to Wales and cast her lot with the gypsies, supplying them with sums of money to keep the secret of her presence among them, and to escape detection always covering her face with a black velvet mask.”

My lord shut his teeth with an audible click, and his nails scratched the lacquered back of the chair upon which he leaned.

“The liar! if I could but have heard him say it,” he uttered, in a dull, hoarse voice. “He has stolen the idea from ‘La Fleur de Foret,’ and—— Go on—go on! Let me hear this out.”

“He said,” resumed my lady, “that from time to time she disappeared, and no one questioned her absence, for she always came back again and resumed her vagabond life. But one day she disappeared never to return. An elderly man with gray beard and hair was seen to accost her in the woods. She seemed terrified by the meeting, but bade the Romanies who flocked to her assistance to leave her alone with the stranger, as she wished to speak

to him. An angry scene ensued—a scene of which they could hear nothing, although by the wrathful gestures of the man it was evident that he was enraged at his companion—but his wrath seemed to cool down after a time, he and his companion strolled off into the woods, and that was the last the gypsies ever saw of the beautiful creature who was known to them only by the Romany name of Zillah.

“This fellow, Jock—that was what he called himself, my lord—swore, however, that when he spoke to Lady Keith at the door of the opera-house, he spoke to and recognized that girl again, and that he would never rest until he found her. She had deserted him, he said, without a hint or warning—deserted him and their little child; and if——”

“The liar—the liar! I will find him and kill him!” broke in Lord Keith with an angry roar. “How dare he make this hideous charge against my wife? How dare he? I say, when there is neither truth in heaven nor a lie in hell black enough to condemn her of the fearful charge, nor proof existing which——”

“There is a proof, he says, my lord!” interrupted Lady Blanche, hastily. “According to this gypsy’s story the day their child was born he placed a talisman around her neck, and that talisman if found would prove the truth of his charge.”

“A talisman?”

“Yes, Lord Keith, a talisman which bore the inscription, ‘*Opollis sulla glut*,’ meaning in the gypsy tongue, ‘Born of the blood of angels,’ and that talisman——”

My lord leaped forward suddenly, and his hand shut suddenly upon her wrist.

“What was it?” he cried out in a strident voice. “Answer me, for God’s sake. What was this talisman like?”

“According to the gypsy’s story it was a small silver star which she wore upon——”

But the last of the sentence fell upon deaf ears.

“A silver star!—my God, a silver star!” panted Lord Keith, as he reeled back and dropped heavily into a chair. “A silver star engraved with a strange inscription, and she—she dropped it that night in the Oak Walk—dropped it and I found and gave it back to her. Oh, my God!—my God! can all these things be chance, or is she really—that?”

CHAPTER XLIX.

"I'LL NOT BELIEVE BUT DESDEMONA'S HONEST."

My lady made no response. She saw by the way he leaned forward in his seat and buried his face in his hands that this last blow had struck home, that he was completely overwhelmed by her infamous lies—lies which her latest calumny, in regard to the silver star, seemed to stamp with the sign and seal of a positive truth—and, bending her head, as though she too shared his misery and despair, she silently eyed him from beneath her thick, dark lashes.

For several seconds nothing disturbed the stillness of the room but the monotonous ticking of the clock, and the dull, labored breathing of the stricken man; then, with one shuddering, indrawn breath, Lord Keith lifted his haggard eyes, and looked up into the face of his torturer.

"If this be true," he said, slowly, "then I shall lose my faith in women, and believe, with others, that Heaven is sometimes cruel enough to put the face of an angel on the shoulders of a fiend! But, oh, it *can't* be true—it can't, it can't!"

Then he groaned and dropped his face into his palms again, and rocked backward and forward in the firelight, as though his misery was too great for words.

My lady moved forward slowly and dropped one soft, white *paw* upon his bowed head.

"Don't hate *me* for telling you all this, my lord!" she softly said. "Remember that you forced me to it—remember that I would have spared you had you only let me do so, Lord Keith, but you were as merciless to yourself as you were uncharitable to me, and now that you have compelled me to clear my own honor at the expense of yours——"

Something like a sob seemed to break her voice; she paused a moment, as though overcome by emotion, clapped both hands over her face, with a little cry of seeming anguish, and then, in a tone of passionate grief:

"Oh, my lord! my lord!" she cried out brokenly, "I wish I had died before I had to tell you this!"

"So do I!" he answered bitterly. "I wish that either you or I were dead and underground before this horror found its way to my ears. There are some things worse than death, and this is one of them! No! don't speak to me for a moment—for God's sake don't, I want to think this thing out!"

Then, leaning his forehead upon the edge of the library table, he folded his arms above his head and sat there, speechless, moveless, dead still for many moments.

So long he held that position, and so utterly lifeless it appeared, my lady began to wonder if he had not swooned, and was upon the point of touching him to ascertain, when he shivered suddenly, sat up with a sort of strangled cry, and turned his face toward hers.

"I don't believe this thing—I *can't*!" he said, in a bitter, strident voice—a voice that belied his words. "Men have been done to death upon circumstantial evidence before now, and I will not believe *her* guilty without stronger proof than this—the mere braggadocio of a low-lived ruffian whose word would not carry weight in any court in the kingdom. I have been thinking it over, and I tell you I won't believe it—I *can't*!"

My lady heaved a deep, tremulous sigh, and glanced at the leaping fire.

"I do not blame you for your fidelity," she said, fighting hard to conceal her chagrin at his stubbornness.

"Like you, I, too, found it hard to believe that such baseness could possibly be connected with such angelic beauty and seeming innocence. To believe Inez guilty of such infamies is almost too much to ask of any one who knows her, and yet— Oh, my lord! my lord! what are we to say to all this string of evidence? What are we to say to this last, most dreadful proof of all—the silver star which the gypsy said would convict her?"

"I don't know," answered his lordship in a hushed voice, a strangely unnatural voice. "Everything seems strange and dark to me at present. I don't know what to doubt and what to believe. I have been wondering if, after all, you really are my friend. Are you?"

"My lord!"—her ladyship glanced up sharply, met for the first time the steady glance of those riveted eyes, and paled under their clear, cold fire—paled until her own pretty, treacherous face was as white as his. "My lord, I—I don't understand you!"

"I don't understand myself," he answered in that same cold, dispassionate voice. "I am like a shipwrecked mariner adrift in the darkness. I cannot tell in which way to steer for the land, and it is only natural, perhaps, that I should bear down upon the first signal light I see. You are unwilling you say to believe her a degraded woman; are you then willing to express to her in my presence that very creditable sentiment? You shrink from believing it possible that she could be as base a wretch as this gypsy scoundrel proclaims her—are you then willing to say to her, in my hearing, that you have heard she had a lover among the people she loathes? Ah! you shrink, and grow pale, my lady! It is a trick of the serpents to bite and crawl away! You are afraid to face

the woman you accuse; you are afraid to say openly before her what you have told under the promise of secrecy to her husband. But that only will I take as proof of your truth; and if you would clear yourself in my eyes, that is the only way to do it.

"Is it? Will you accept it as proof of my honesty, Lord Keith?" responded my lady, coming a step forward, and holding out both hands with a pretty, innocent trick like the artless act of an appealing child. "If I do what you ask of me, will you believe—as Heaven already knows—that you have misjudged and condemned me most unjustly, Lord Keith? If so I accept the terms and promise to do what you desire."

His lordship's face flushed, then paled again, and the hopeful look, which, but a few moments before had lighted it, vanished and left it haggard and drawn again.

He had not believed that she would accept the proposition, but now—now her willingness seemed a confirmation of his darkest fears, and he almost wished that he had not asked her to stand this test.

"Yes, I will believe you then," he said. "No matter whether she prove innocent or guilty of the charges brought against her, I will believe that you at least have told the truth, and told it as a friend!"

"Then I accept the proposition," returned her ladyship, with a look of martyred innocence, "but remember, whatever comes of this rash step, you have forced me to it against my will, Lord Keith. I will tell to Inez all that I have told you, and you shall hear and see how she takes the news. I would not, however—lest she should eventually clear herself of these cruel charges—have her believe that I have entered into a conspiracy with *you*, or done ought to lower her in your eyes, and for that reason I beg you to aid me in practicing a little deception upon her.

"Go to her and ask her to favor you with an interview in the conservatory. Invent any pretext you like, to have her go there and await your coming; and two minutes after she has complied with the request, steal back and secrete yourself amongst the flowers, and wait until I come forward and speak to her."

A deep ridge gathered between Lord Keith's brows, and a dull red flush swept suddenly over his face.

"You wish me to play the sneak and *spy* upon her?" he said, indignantly. "You wish me to act like a coward and a cur, and make myself only more despicable in her eyes than I should be in my own? I do not doubt my wife, Lady Hay. I have no reason to skulk about in this underhand way, and my place when she meets you is by

her side, not prowling in the background to listen and to spy!"

"And do you think she will talk to me if you are there?" returned her ladyship.

"I do not for a moment doubt but what she will clear herself and explain away all these charges; but if there should be even the semblance of a truth in them, do you think that she will confess it in your presence? Besides, when all this mystery is cleared up, would you not rather have your wife kept in ignorance of the fact that you compelled her friend to lay a trap for her in self-defense than have her learn that you doubted her even for an instant? Then, too, you can slip away when the interview is over, and Inez need never suspect that you overheard it. Oh, my lord! I am so truly your friend that I wish to save you from hating yourself and being despised by her. It is better that you should act in this way—better for you, for her—for me—and I beg of you do nothing now which you will bitterly regret in the days to come."

"Perhaps you are right," returned his lordship, huskily. "I do not fancy the *role* of eavesdropper, but anything is better than that she should believe I doubted her honor and conspired with you to trap her. It shall be as you say, then, Lady Blanche. But if the miserable truth ever comes to light I depend upon you—you who profess to be my friend—to exonerate me in this affair, and to assure my wife that my faith in her never wavered, and it was for your sake only—for the sake of proving you what you claim to be—that I consented to do this miserable thing."

"You can depend upon me to do that—yes!" responded her ladyship; and walking straight to the door, Lord Keith unlocked it and laid his hand upon the knob.

"I will go to her now and bid her retire to the conservatory and await my coming," he said. "But understand this, Lady Blanche: it is only the certainty that she will refute these charges, and give positive proof of their falseness—only that, and the desire to see you vindicated—which makes this contemptible act excusable to me. If I doubted your sincerity, at the least, my faith in her has never wavered, and never will!"

Then turning abruptly he opened the door and closed it, and was gone.

"Poor fool! poor fool! your faith is wavering *now*!" exclaimed my lady, with a soft, suppressed laugh as he stalked out and vanished. "It is wavering now, and it will fall—a ruin—before another hour passes over your

head. Keith, I have you on the hip at last, and to-night will see my score wiped out in tears of blood!"

She glanced at the clock as she ceased speaking, saw that it pointed five minutes after nine, and with the fleet, soundless movement of a cat crossed the room and opened the door.

"It is past the hour," she said, with a soft laugh, "past the hour, and Jock and my father are already in the grounds. Only on a poaching visit, you know, my dear Lord Keith; they only come to bag a rabbit from the Glandore warren, and it will be quite accidental if my esteemed papa manages to have his unsuspecting companion in the neighborhood of the conservatory *when the lights are turned up!*" Misery for misery, and heart for heart, Keith. I have waited long, but my hour has come at last!"

Then, fluttering onward through the semi-darkened halls, she made her way to the passage which led to the conservatory, and, like a silent serpent scenting afar the sleeping dove, glided away to consummate the work of its destruction.

CHAPTER L.

AT NO. 27 RUE DES ANGES.

"BUT, Mrs. Herndon——"

"'But—no buts,' my dear. The doctor's orders were that you were to be kept perfectly quiet for three days, and then, if you are a good girl"—this with a playful pinch of the wan, white cheek which rested upon the cool, sweet-smelling pillows—"you are to get up and be dressed; and, as those three days won't expire until to-morrow morning puts in an appearance, you will have to lie there and keep perfectly still, for I sha'n't answer another single question, no matter how you plead! You are doing so nicely that I'm not going to risk a relapse and another three weeks' sickness by satisfying your curiosity, my dear!"

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Inez, in blank amazement, with a tone of pronounced dismay. "Oh, Mrs. Herndon, you surely can't mean that I have been lying here for three weeks! Why, I thought, when I awoke the other morning, that I—I had only been taken ill the night before—you said so, I am sure—but three weeks! Oh, it can't be possible! Is it? really?"

But good Mrs. Herndon had turned away, and was busy raking down the fire for the night, and, either didn't hear, or didn't wish to; anyway, she was as dumb as an

oyster, even though Inez repeated the question three times.

"Now, then, kiss me good-night, and go to sleep, like a good girl," exclaimed the motherly old soul, after she had put everything in order for the night, and was upon the point of retiring. "If you want anything after I have left you, just reach out your hand and ring this bell; my room adjoins this one, and I shall leave the door between open all night long, and— No, no, no! you mustn't ask me any more questions, for I really shall not answer them."

"But only one, dear Mrs. Herndon," pleaded Inez, with tearful earnestness. "I'll go right to sleep then—I promise you that I will—and, if you'll only just let me ask you one little question—"

"Very well, then; but only one, mind! Now, then, what is it?"

"Please tell me how long I have been sick, and what has been the matter with me? and if Lord Glandore or— or anybody else has called to see me?"

"And you call that *one* question, do you?" responded Mrs. Herndon, with a gentle smile. "Well, it's three, to my way of counting, my dear; but if you'll promise me not to ask another, and to go to sleep the very minute I leave you, I'll answer all of them. You have been sick exactly twenty-three days this very evening; you've passed through a serious attack of brain fever, and there has been no one here but Robert and the doctor and me. There now, not another word! Good-night and God bless you, my dear! I hope and pray that you will be strong enough to sit up in the morning."

Then dropping a tender kiss upon Miss Catheron's pale, startled face, she gently lowered the light and passed into the adjoining room.

But for all she had promised, sleep came not readily to Inez Catheron's eyes after that, and far into the silent watches of the night she lay there, staring up into the darkness and pondering over her strange fate.

"Sick twenty-three days!" she murmured, in a low, terrified voice; "sick twenty-three days and abandoned to the care of strangers! Oh, my Heaven! my Heaven! what does it mean? what can it mean? He repudiated me in the letter—grandpa repudiated me—when I felt sure that he must be half crazed over my disappearance, and even Alaric abandons me—Alaric who was so fond."

To her surprise, the fact of Lord Keith's abandonment did not hurt her a quarter so much as the knowledge that her grandfather and her aunt had deserted her in this mysterious and unheard-of fashion; and, while she knew

that by every law of nature it was only right and proper for her to find her worst sorrow in the knowledge that her affianced husband had shown no interest in her fate, the fact remained that her keenest anguish lay in the thought that her own relatives had discarded her.

She knew that she ought to be prostrated by her lover's desertion more than by her grandfather's, but somehow she could not rule her feelings and bend them to her will.

The sweetness and the tenderness had somehow dropped out of that bright love-dream in the moment when she read in the register of the Hotel de Paris that the man who had won her girl's heart had married another, and was lost to *her* forever; and, try as hard as she would, she *could not* recall it in its former intensity, and could not think of *him* now without some shadow of contempt for his short-lived passion.

And so, pondering and marveling over this unaccountable change in her feelings, she fell asleep at last, and dreamed that she was walking through a garden of roses, hand in hand with her grandfather and Robert Herndon.

It was close to nine o'clock when she awoke at last, to find Mrs. Herndon entering the room with a tempting breakfast spread out upon a large japanned tray; and whatever shadows might have clung about her memory, they were dispelled by the sunshine of that dear old face.

"Good-morning, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Herndon, as she set down the tray and spread out the tempting breakfast. "You are looking a hundred times better than yesterday, and somebody else will be quite as glad of that as I am. But no questions for the present, if you please. I know that you are aching to ask dozens of them, but I positively forbid it until you have eaten your breakfast. You're going to get up and be dressed this morning for being such a good girl yesterday."

"You treat me like a little child, dear Mrs. Herndon," laughed Inez, softly. "If I remain under your care much longer, I shall positively doubt that I have passed the tender and guileless age of six!"

Whereupon Margaret Herndon laughed too, and having seen Inez attack her breakfast, she bustled about, put the room in order, and then brought forth a pretty morning robe of pearl and gray silk with soft touches of lace and pale-blue ribbons, and placed it across a chair in readiness for the invalid to don when the time came for her to arise. Breakfast passed, and "dressing" began at last.

"What a pretty gown!" exclaimed Inez, as the dear old soul brought it forward and began arranging her in it. "It is quite new, too, and—and—— May I ask a

question now? Have you been wasting your money by purchasing this for me?"

"No, indeed," responded Mrs. Herndon, gayly. "I made it myself, dear—made it at night while you were sleeping. Robert brought me the material. It was given to him by one of his customers."

"Then it was meant for you and you have deprived yourself of a pretty gown for the sake of adorning me!"

"Oh, dear, no! It is much too gay for such an old foggy as his mother," laughed Mrs. Herndon, good-humoredly. "He chose the colors because they suited you, he said, and the dear foolish fellow ransacked half a dozen shops before he could find just the particular shade of grey he desired."

"But you said it was given to him, Mrs. Herndon?"

"Why, yes, certainly—of course it was! Given in exchange for a little scrap of painting which he had in his studio. Monsieur Renaud wanted it very much last summer, but Robert didn't care to part with it then, but when it occurred to him that you needed some garments he took it to Monsieur Renaud's shop, and— Well, they gave him what he wanted, and he made Monsieur Renaud a present of the picture, that's all!"

A faint, warm color drifted into Inez's cheeks, and her blue eyes filled with tears.

"And he parted with a picture he wished to keep to secure clothing for me—a mere outcast, a stranger, who has no claim upon his bounty!" she said huskily. "Oh, Mrs. Herndon, why did you let him do it? Surely I have been trouble and expense enough with that?"

"Tut! tut! tut! my dear, don't talk nonsense!" responded Mrs. Herndon, with a laugh, "and now that you're all dressed, if you want to reward him for his patience, just give me leave to put him out of his misery by telling him that he may come up and see you."

"With all my heart," returned Inez as she sunk gracefully but wearily into the deep, soft chair which Mrs. Herndon placed for her before the grate fire. "Tell him that I shall be glad to see and thank him for all his goodness to me."

Mrs. Herndon nodded and smiled her thanks for this privilege, and having removed the breakfast dishes and made up the bed—chatting the while with Inez, and fluttering about like a little brown wren—darted out of the room and returned presently with Robert.

"Now, then, ask all the questions you like, my dear," she twittered in her blithe, bird-like way, as she led the big, handsome fellow forward, blushing furiously and looking as happy as a schoolboy with a pair of new

skates, "for I shan't be afraid now of letting out all the secrets I've been cautioned to keep during the past three days!"

"Oh, I'm immensely happy to see you up and looking so well again, Miss Inez!" exclaimed Robert, taking the little white hand she held out to him, and squeezing it harder than he knew between his big warm palms. "I can't begin to tell you how eagerly my mother and I have looked forward to this day."

Inez lifted her eyes, blushed, and let them drop again. The position was a peculiarly embarrassing one after the blundering admission he had made to her regarding his motive for painting "*La Fleur de Foret*," and for a moment she knew not what to say.

"Your mother has been telling me what you have done for me, Mr. Herndon," she said, after a momentary pause. "I don't know how to thank you, for it is not a case where mere thanks can repay. I have been a great trial and expense to you, but when I grow strong enough to help myself, I hope and pray that I may have an opportunity to prove to you how grateful I am for all that you have done."

"I do not require it. I do not ask it," he said in reply. "The consciousness that you have passed through the struggle and will soon be well and strong again, is the only reward I seek. It has been a happiness to do something for you, Miss Inez—I hope you will believe that."

"I do believe it," she answered. "You have been to me the truest and kindest of friends, Mr. Herndon, when all others have failed—others who should have stood by me, and whose desertion I cannot understand."

A cloud seemed to come across his face, and his lips quivered.

He had hoped that her delusion would have passed with the fever, but now he realized that that hope was vain.

She saw the change, and was quick to understand its meaning.

"You thought me unsound of mind when first I came to you, Mr. Herndon, and you think so still," she said; "and when I recollect how strangely I have been repudiated, I can scarcely blame you for it. But there is some strange and terrible mystery here, for it cannot be possible that I have dreamed my life—it cannot be possible that I have been mad for twenty years and only now have become sane. There has been no effort made to look into my case, your mother tells me—no effort upon the part of Lord Glandore, I mean——"

"None," he answered dejectedly. "Would you like to read his letter again? Here it is."

He put it into her hands as he spoke, and unfolding it with trembling fingers, Inez slowly read it through, her face paling again, and her eyes expanding, part in terror, part in surprise.

Robert watched her intently until she had reached the conclusion, then, putting his hand into his pocket, he drew forth a folded newspaper.

"It is the London *Times*," he said, as he held it out to her, and placed his finger upon a paragraph which he had previously marked. "See this item, Miss Inez, and tell me what you think. It is an announcement of Lady Inez Keith's illness—she has been prostrated for some weeks by a nervous fever, and still lies ill at—Glandore Court."

Inez glanced at the paragraph, and breathlessly read it.

For a moment she sat with her eyes fastened upon the paper—sitting bolt upright, and neither speaking nor moving—then, with a sudden, wailing cry, she dropped back in her seat, and clapped both hands over her face.

"My Heaven! have I *been* mad, or am I losing my reason *now*?" she cried out, in a faint, heart-wrung voice. "I have been Inez Catheron for twenty years, and now! What am I? Who am I, since I have ceased to be myself?"

CHAPTER LI.

"THE WOMAN'S HEEL SHALL BRUISE THE SERPENT'S HEAD."

ROBERT leaned gently over her chair, and as he did so something warm and wet trickled down his cheek and dropped upon her bright, bowed head.

"What does it matter, so that you have found friends who love you, and will stand between you and the world forever?" he gently said. "You are here, Miss Inez, here with my mother and me. Try to be happy with us, and who shall say that the dream was ever sweeter than the awakening may yet become? Dear, if a life's devotion can make the humble reality atone for the splendid image of your fancy, there lies before you an everlasting paradise. Your home is here—henceforth—let no fear for the future ever enter your head."

She took the hand he rested upon the arm of her chair, and obeying a sudden impulse lifted it to her lips.

"It were worth fifty fortunes to gain one friend like this!" she said, looking up at him with streaming eyes; "and weighed in Heaven's balance Inez Catheron, the outcast, is richer by far than Inez Catheron the heiress ever was. It is not for the lost wealth I grieve, and not for the man who is content to take another for his wife, so

that she bear my name and inherit my fortune; it is because I have been deceived in those who professed to love me—because I have lost home, relatives, identity, and for no act of my own am exiled like this. Oh, Robert, Mr. Herndon, I——”

“Why change it?” he interrupted, gently. “Let it be ‘Robert’ always—Robert and mother—if you will, Inez. They will seem sweeter to us, if you can learn to use them.”

“Robert and *mother*!” she softly said, reaching out a hand to each, and smiling as they took them. “Oh, I am rich again! for if the purse is bankrupt, the heart is a millionaire. I have lost a palace, but I have gained a *home*, and all that fate took from me is not worth this which Heaven gives in return. My life before this, whether real or fancied, was without a purpose, Robert, but has found one now, and I shall not again relinquish it!”

“You mean that you will begin to forget the dream and remember only the awakening, Inez?”

“No,” she answered. “I mean that I will *prove* the dream, and having proved it, live only in the awakening. Such goodness as you and your mother have shown to me deserves a richer reward than the empty thanks of the outcast and the burden of another dependent. If I *am* Inez Catheron I have rights which must be recognized, and wealth which shall not be held by robbers and ingrates. If I am *not* Inez Catheron, it is but just to you and to me to prove who and what I am, and why I was incarcerated in a madhouse, before you opened your doors to me and received me into your home. There is a mystery here which must and shall be cleared up, Robert, for if I am *not* Inez Catheron, I must discover who I really am.”

“Dear, you need not let it trouble you. Besides, it may be a harder task than you imagine, for even the gypsies denied your existence, and it is only fair to suppose that they will now deny your identity.”

“The gypsies!” she echoed, with a faint shudder of disgust. “Oh, Robert, why will you persist in fancies when you seek to drive them away from *me*? I tell you I know no gypsies—never spoke to one in my life, and as for being connected with them even in the most remote way——”

“Will you let me show you something, Inez?” he interrupted, gently. “You are still too weak to walk, but——Will you let me carry you in my arms and show you the picture I painted from memory after the night I spent in the gypsies’ camp at Carn Ruth, in Wales? You expressed a wish to see it before you were taken ill, and since then I

have had it carried into my studio. Will you let me take you there and show you my masterpiece?"

"Yes," she answered, excitedly, her mind reverting to the story he had told her regarding "La Fleur de Foret," "I should like to see it, Robert. But you must not think of carrying me. I am sure that I can walk, with a little assistance."

She had arisen to her feet while speaking; but her weakness was only too apparent; and catching up a shawl that lay close at hand, he bundled it about her, and before she realized his intention, lifted her in his powerful arms and strode toward the door.

"See! you are but a feather's weight, after all!" he lightly said; and laughing at her protests, stalked away with her out of the room, across the hallway, and so into his studio.

"Look!" he exclaimed, as he bore her to the place where the painting stood resting against the wall, and seated her upon a shabby old lounge before it. "Look! that is the girl I saw in the gypsies' camp. Tell me, do you recognize her face?"

She caught her breath with one fluttering gasp of amazement, and sat upright suddenly, staring at the picture for many moments, as though a spell or stupor had fallen upon her. Then:

"Am I looking in a mirror, or is that face really painted upon the canvas?" she exclaimed, in a slow, wavering voice.

"It is painted—see!" he answered, passing his hand over the canvas and drumming lightly upon it with his finger-tips. "So I saw that girl in life, Inez, and so I shall continue to see her until the day of my death. I shall never paint the equal of that picture again; my fame rose with it, and will set with it; but though my name be never heard in the world of art again, the picture will yet have achieved its purpose, and its sale bring me enough to keep us in a happy, humble way all the rest of our lives. It is to be my dower to my bride when I win her. If it had not been reserved for that, I could have sold it to Lady Keith three weeks ago, and received my own price."

"To Lady Keith!" repeated Inez, huskily. "Did she want that picture? And you—you saw her then—saw the woman who has stolen away my birthright, and married him?"

"No," he answered. "I saw her husband only. Lord Keith came to me to purchase the picture for his wife when it was on exhibition at the *salon*. She was possessed of a fever to buy it, but I told him it was not for sale—

promised him that when it *was*, Lady Keith should have the first refusal of it. He was excited at first, but gradually calmed down, although he seemed worried and anxious when I refused to part with the picture, and eventually offered to pay me any reasonable price to have the picture removed from the walls of the *salon*."

"And you did it?"

Inez spoke so suddenly and with such vehemence that he turned and stared at her in surprise.

"Yes," he said, "I had it removed from exhibition that very night. Lord Keith said that it would be a constant regret to his wife if the picture hung there, and she unable to purchase it, and out of consideration to Lady Keith's feelings, I promised to have it removed, while at——"

A sharp and sudden cry from Inez broke in upon his words.

"That woman—that woman!" she cried out excitedly, "Robert, that woman knows something regarding my disappearance—her eagerness to have the picture hidden proves that she does, and I am now more sure than ever that the past was real, and I am Inez Catheron after all!"

Robert groaned and averted his face.

"Ah! will you never dispel this idle fancy, dear?" he said, sadly. "Even in the face of such proof as this picture offers, can you still doubt that the past was a dream, and I saw you as a gypsy at the very time when you claim to have been at Glandore Court? I was not dreaming, or I could not have reproduced your face so perfectly, nor is it possible that you could have been seen in two places at once."

A sudden cry from Inez—a cry, sharp, shrill, full of a strange blending of fear and joy—rang suddenly forth as he ceased speaking, for memory had suddenly traveled back to that far-off night when Lord Keith first came to join the house-party at Glandore Court, and her mind recurred to the story he told of the phantom face which had looked at him through the shrubbery at Bracken Hollow—a face that was the counterpart of her own.

"The gypsies! the gypsies!" she cried out, excitedly. "They came to Bracken Hollow only the night before, and that face—— Oh, Robert, Robert, I understand all at last! I have a double somewhere—there is a woman in existence who so closely resembles me that she has stolen my birthright and robbed me of my name!"

"Oh, Inez, Inez! what new fancy is this?"

"It is not a fancy; it is truth—truth!" she protested. "And, if you are, indeed, my friend, prove it now. Do me one favor—one little favor, Robert, and I will never

ask another, and never harbor this 'fancy,' as you call it, from the hour it is granted to me. I shall be well and strong enough in a fortnight; please promise to do me a favor then—promise me that, I implore!”

“If it be in my power to grant it——”

“It is in your power—it is! it is!”

“Then I promise to do it, Inez!” he answered, gently.

“Now tell me what you desire?”

“Take me to Glandore Court!” she responded, excitedly.

“Take me where I can see Lord Keith’s wife, and stand face to face with the Earl of Glandore, and, if I fail to prove then that I *am* Inez Catheron, I swear to you, Robert, that I will believe the past a dream, and let you make the future what you will!”

CHAPTER LII.

“TO LOVE OR HATE—TO WIN OR LOSE.”

LIKE one drunk with wine, Lord Keith staggered down the semi-darkened corridor, after he walked out of the library and left Lady Blanche, and bent his steps in the direction of the drawing-room, where he knew he should find his wife in the company of Lady Elsdale and the old earl; but before he reached the doorway, a sudden revulsion of feeling overcame him, and, slipping into the smoking-room, he closed the door, sunk down upon a divan, and bowed his face between his hands. For a time he remained thus, then he laughed aloud—a strange, hollow, half hysterical laugh—and springing to his feet, turned toward the door, for the purpose of going instantly to his wife and performing the part he had promised, when he caught sight of his own face in the mirror over the fire-place, and stopped short with a startled exclamation, and stood death still, staring at the ghastly reflection.

“My God! have a few minutes changed me like that?” he uttered, in a dull, hoarse whisper. “I can’t go before her with that face, or she will know that something has upset me—something terrible enough to give me the look of a man who has been put to the rack—and yet I must see her, I must have this matter settled before we are an hour older.”

It did not take him long to decide how to act in the face of this new difficulty—his mind might be clouded in other things, but it was clear enough there—and turning without an instant’s delay to the electric button set in the wall beside the fireplace, he pressed it thrice with his finger as a signal that service was needed in the smoking-room.

In less than a minute a powdered, gold-laced footman

tapped for admission, and in answer to the summons came in, and found his lordship standing at the window as though intently studying the moonlit sky.

"Which is it, my lord?—brandy or cigars? Or will you have both?" he asked, in a deferential tone, for a call to the smoking-room was generally understood to take that shape.

"Neither!" responded his lordship, keeping his back to the man and striving hard to speak naturally. "Have the kindness to step into the drawing-room and say to Lady Keith that there is something here which I wish to show her. That is all."

The footman bowed himself out of the room, but not until the closing of the door had assured him that he was alone, did Lord Keith cease to act as though he were engrossed in some astronomical phenomenon, or venture to turn his livid countenance toward the light.

But even then, it was only visible for an instant, for having accomplished his purpose, he strode directly to the center of the room, reached up his hand to the key of the chandelier, and with one swift movement shut off the gas.

A partial darkness was the result—darkness tempered only by the faint red gleam of the coals in the open grate, and arraying a screen before this, so that the glancing light might not fall upon him, Lord Keith turned back to the window, and had just resumed his old position when the rustling sound of a woman's gown came up the corridor, the door opened softly and his wife glided into the room.

"Springer tells me that you wish to show me something, Alaric," she said, as she advanced, "but mercy! How gloomy it is here. This is what dear old Martha Boggs calls 'blindman's holiday.' Springer must have forgotten his duty this evening. Where is the taper? Sha'n't I light the gas?"

She had reached forth her hand while speaking, toward the place where the taper always hung, and in a moment more would have thrust the end of it into the glowing grate, had not his lordship stayed the act.

"No!" he answered, hastily. "It is not necessary. Never mind the gas. Come here—I wish to speak with you!"

In his nervous fear lest she should light the gas and see his face as he had seen it in the mirror, he spoke so sharply and excitedly that she noticed the alteration in his tone, her hand dropped away from the taper and fell, a dead weight, at her side, and as though some shadow of suspicion crossed her mind, she started violently, remained

standing for a moment as white and motionless as marble, then with a faint, fluttering breath:

"What is the matter?" she said, in a weak, treacherous voice, reaching forth her hand again as she spoke, and leaning heavily upon the back of a chair for support.

"Has anything gone wrong? Why have you sent for me? Have you heard bad news, Alaric?"

"Yes," he answered, turning and looking at her as she stood there, with the firelight gleam on her face and hair, and the flowing lines of her white gown. "Yes, I have heard bad news, Inez; but it need not startle you, dear, for things which seem bad at first, have often quite a trifling appearance when we study them out. There may be nothing much in this, after all; but I wish to talk with you about—about Lancedene!"

"Your ancestral home!" she breathed, with a sigh of infinite relief. "Oh, yes, we were to clear off the mortgages as soon as we returned from our bridal tour. I hope that it is not too late. Alaric, why did you not speak to me of it before?"

"No, it is not too late!" he answered, glad of this excuse. "But I should like to speak with you about it, and there are some plans for improving the estate which I should like to show you, dear. I think that Adolph packed them in one of my trunks. I'll run up and see, however. Would you mind going to the conservatory, dear, and waiting there until I come down? It is rather close in here."

"No, certainly not! Why should I?" she answered, with such radiance that his conscience smote him again. "You know I am fond of sitting in the conservatory to talk. The scent of the flowers and trees, and the faint, moist warmth of the air always makes me think of roaming through the woods and fields in summer time; and that seems"—she was upon the point of saying "natural to me," but recollected herself, and added quickly—"that seems to bring back a memory of the night when you first told me that you loved me, Alaric. Yes, I will go to the conservatory, with pleasure. Shall you be long, dear?"

"About ten or fifteen minutes," he answered, as he opened the door and stood back in the shadow while she passed him and went out. "I am not certain just where to lay my hand upon the plans, and it will take me all of that to rummage through my effects and find them. Don't look for me any sooner, at all events."

"I will try to be patient," she answered, with a light laugh.

Then fluttering away in the twilight of the semi-darkened corridor, she turned down the branching passage

which led to the ballroom and the conservatory, and a moment or two later Lord Keith heard the faint clash of the crystal doors closing behind her, and knew that she had gone to face the ordeal.

For a moment he paused with bowed head and limply hanging hands, as though ashamed of himself, and humbly bending to that burden of remorse which he felt must soon be his to bear; then, with a sudden movement, he stepped out into the corridor, closed the door of the smoking-room, and softly but swiftly went after her.

Whatever faith had fallen before my lady's wicked lies and crafty schemes, one look into his wife's face had strengthened and revived again, and this was certain: When a moment later he silently opened the crystal doors of the conservatory and slid like a shadow behind the clustering foliage, he went to play the spy upon a woman in whose purity he firmly believed, and whose honor he felt with the certainty of positive knowledge would be vindicated before another hour had passed.

CHAPTER LIII.

“'TIS CALLED THE MOUSE-TRAP.”

STRAIGHT across the ballroom to the doors of the conservatory—her pretty face aflame with malicious smiles, her dark andalusian eyes agleam with a tawny, wolfish light, and her wicked little heart fairly bounding with a rapturous happiness—my Lady Blanche Hay went, after she left the library, and stealing in amongst the foliage and the flowers fluttered airily down the long, bloom-bordered avenue between the low-turned flames of the violet lamps which lined both sides of the walk, made her way to a clump of palms close to the rear door of the greenhouse, and brushing aside the foliage leaned forward and looked in.

A thin iron tube surmounted by a small wheel, not too large to be entirely covered by the palm of her own little white hand—that was all the brushing aside of the palms' leaves revealed, but that little was quite enough to satisfy my lady, as the expression of her face revealed.

She put forth her hand, clasped the little wheel, turned it a trifle—first to the right and then to the left—with the result that all the lamps of the conservatory suddenly flashed forth a brilliant light, and then as suddenly grew dim again.

“That will do,” she muttered, as she withdrew her hand, allowing the palms to come together again and conceal the simple device by which the lighting of the conservatory was governed. “One preliminary flash of the

lights was the signal agreed upon—the signal to be ready for the master-stroke—and if all has gone well, and you are in the grounds as you promised, my estimable father, it will not be long before the curtain rings up on the turning-point of the tragedy. But if you are *not* there——”

She caught her breath with one sharp gasp as though even the bare prospect of such a thing cut her to the quick; and then recovering herself, shrugged her shoulders with a short, metallic laugh.

“What miserable nonsense I am talking!” she exclaimed as she moved further down the avenue and approached the rear door of the conservatory. “Not there—Marco not there—when the vengeance he has waited for for years depends upon his presence! I might as reasonably glance outside to see if the sky were still there as to fear Marco’s absence to-night. He is there, sure enough, there with the precious young fool he has invited to join him in a poaching expedition; and it only remains for me to pave the way for him, like this!”

And “like this” was further illustrated by her ladyship softly removing the fastenings of the rear door, and gently swinging it open, allowing a breeze from the outer world to sweep over the flowers and mingle its frosty breath with the artificial atmosphere of the conservatory.

“When you wish to come you will find the way clear, my hot-headed Gypsy Jock!” she chuckled, as she turned away and crept out of sight behind a hedge of orange-trees, loaded with fruits and flowers. “The audience is assembled, the overture has been played, the actors wait, and now nothing remains but for the curtain to rise and the tragedy to begin. Come, Lady Zillah Keith; come, my lord, the *trusting husband*, the hour I have waited for is here at last, and I am eager to strike a fang into your flesh and see the poison rankle!”

Then sinking down into a rustic seat behind the orange-trees, she leaned her dark head back against the rail of the garden chair and patiently waited for the arrival of her victims.

Some five or six minutes passed without the faintest sound disturbing the stillness—for during this time all that was related in the foregoing chapter took place—then there echoed the soft pit-pat, pit-pat of a woman’s foot-falls, the sound of the crystal doors opening and closing, the *frou-frou* of a silken garment brushing the marble pavement of the avenue, and my lady, parting the branches of her bowered retreat, peered forth and caught sight of Zillah.

She was sauntering leisurely down the paved avenue of the conservatory, humming softly to herself, and pluck-

ing a flower here and there, to make a bouquet for the purpose of passing away the time until her husband should come to keep his appointment with her—the faint gleam of the violet lamps shedding a tender glow over her as she slowly moved from flower to flower and tree to tree, her jewels catching the light and flashing it back in rainbow rays, her white silken gown trailing in graceful folds along the marble pavement, and her head in that light—wreathed as with a halo, born of the gas-gleams on her own bright hair.

Leaning forward, and watching that white figure as it slowly glided toward her, my lady had suddenly become aware that the doors which led from the ballroom to the conservatory were slowly swinging open—slowly, soundlessly, but surely—and, bending further forward, with one sharp, indrawn breath, she watched for the end.

It came, with scarce a moment's pause between the soundless opening of the doors and their silent closing; at first but a shadow lengthening across the pavement, then the swift passage of a body, going from one side of the avenue to the other, and disappearing in the aisles of leaves; but in that one instant, as it crossed the open space where the lights fell faintly on it, my lady had recognized the face and figure of Alaric Keith, and knew that her waiting was at an end.

Utterly unconscious—for her back was toward the door by which her husband had entered, and his soundless step had struck no note of warning upon her ear as he crossed the marble pavement—Zillah was straying down the bloom-walled avenue, humming softly the sweet refrain of a tender love-song, and filling her belt with some loose sprays of heliotrope massed with white carnations, and pausing but a moment that her victim might reach the spot where she wished their meeting to take place, my lady rustled sharply forward and confronted her.

At the sound of her hasty footfall, Zillah started and glanced up, saw her as she came speeding forward, saw, too, the open door beyond, and, with a faint, fluttering cry, dropped the flowers she was gathering and recoiled.

"Fly!" exclaimed Lady Blanche, as she fluttered forward and paused beside the clump of palms before alluded to; "fly, or all is lost. Your old lover, Gypsy Jock, has tracked you down and threatens to betray you to your husband!"

My lord, peering from behind the foliage opposite the spot where this encounter had taken place, leaned forward with a glad smile on his lips, waiting for the indignant an-

swer to this startling and unexpected accusation, but he waited in vain, for it never came.

At the mention of that name all Zillah's vital forces seemed to collapse; every vestige of color left her cheeks and lips; a look like the look in the eyes of a cornered animal arose in hers, and she lifted them to Lady Blanche's face and fell back, weak and faint with terror.

"Jock!" she cried out in an awful voice. "Jock—here?—at Glandore Court? Oh, wretch! wretch! it is you, then, who have called him here, and you have betrayed me!"

"Does it look like betrayal when I am come to warn you?" exclaimed her ladyship excitedly. "Does it look like betrayal when I tell you of his presence in time for you to fly before he encounters your husband, and tells him—tells Lord Keith—of the time when you lived among gypsies and owned yourself one of them? Do you think that I wish to see murder done?—as it will be if they two meet!"

"Murder!"

"Yes, murder—for your gypsy lover is the sworn enemy of the man you have married, and if he cannot have vengeance upon him——"

"He must not—he shall not," broke in Zillah, with a shriek. "I love him—I love him, and before Jock's hand shall be lifted against Alaric—I will acknowledge the truth—acknowledge the shameful thing I have done—and go back to the hideous old life, and become again and forever a vagabond and a gypsy! Alaric must not be harmed. Whatever sin there has been it is mine, Lady Blanche, mine! and my husband shall not be slain for my misdeeds!"

My lady almost screamed with delight at this reckless outburst.

"And do you think you can prevent it? Jock is here, I tell you, and he avows his purpose to have the life of the man who came between him and you. Fly while there is yet time, for what chance have you against such odds as this? If you save Lord Keith's life, what, think you, will he say to the disclosure Jock has to make? What, think you, will he say when Jock tells him the true story of 'La Fleur de Foret' and confesses that what Robert Herndon said regarding the original of the picture is true in every particular? What will your husband say when he hears that? What will he say when he learns what you were in the past when you lived among the gypsies and were known to them as Zillah the——"

"Help me—save me—protect me, Heaven!" she broke in wildly. "He mustn't know—he mustn't know! I'd

sooner drop dead this minute than have him discover what I was in the past, and how shamefully I have deceived him! I'll buy Jock off; I'll pay any price—any price! but the shameful secret shall be kept!”

“But what price can you offer *me* that is worth such shame as this!”

The voice came like the falling of a thunder-bolt upon poor Zillah's ears, and, whirling as she heard and recognized it, she found herself standing face to face with her husband!

“Oh, Heaven! Lord Keith!” exclaimed Lady Blanche, in well-simulated surprise, as she recoiled and clapped both hands over her face—for the express purpose of hiding the look of diabolical joy which she knew was there.

But Zillah made no movement—uttered no outcry.

In the moment she turned and faced him, all the vital springs seemed to run dry, and even the power to fall at his feet seemed denied to her, for she stood there and looked at him as though she had been changed to stone.

“For God's sake, tell me, is this thing true?” he cried, shrinking back from her, as though her very breath bred pestilence and death. “Are you, whom God has given me to be the wife of my bosom, the sharer of my name, the mother of my children—are you *that*?”

No answer—no movement.

She stood bolt upright, looking at him with the eyes of death, but giving no sign she heard—no evidence but that his words had killed her.

“Answer me!” he cried, gripping her arm and giving her a shake. “Are you so sunk in shame that you will not have pity on the man who has married you, and for once be honest with him? Is it true what I have heard, and *are you* such a wretch as that?”

“Alaric!”

It was the first word she uttered, the first sign she had given that she realized what he said or did, but the amount of pathos crowded into that one word—the sorrow and suffering and shame that seemed to quiver through her tone, and through every fiber of her being as she spoke it, can never be reproduced by mere words.

“Answer me!” he cried again. “Will you or will you not tell me to my face that you have wantonly betrayed me, cruelly duped me, and with a mask of innocence covered a past of hypocrisy and shame? Do you not see? I have become so low by sharing your life and giving my honor into your polluted hands, that you must glut the cravings of my vile nature and let it learn afresh how foul a thing it has become. I have heard once, but it does not

satisfy me. Tell me again. I am eager to hear the whole measure of my shame, and will not let you rob me of a hair-weight. Tell me again if all this thing is true!"

"Alaric!"

"Oh, cheat! Oh, miserly cheat, will you rob me of half that is my due, and try to appease my thirsting soul with the sweet-lipped sounding of my name alone? Tell me! tell me! My God, before I kill you! Is it true?"

"Yes," she answered, in a voice that scarcely stirred the stillness. "Kill me, it will be sweet to die. It is true—it is true!"

He lifted the hand that still clutched her wrist—lifted it passionately, swiftly, vehemently, bringing hers up with it, as though he meant to dash her to the earth and trample on her; then, with a strange, wild cry, that was like the whining of a wounded animal, he loosed his grip, and flung her powerless arm from him.

She had not flinched through all; her eyes had met his eyes with a look as though she begged that he would kill her, and something that was like sorrow seemed to come over her face when she realized that he would not.

"Kill me, Alaric!" she faintly cried. "I have lost all that I would care to live for. Kill me—I should like to die!"

"Kill you!" he echoed, with a terrible laugh. "Ah, no! death is not for you, Lady Keith. The world needs such women as you—needs them to stand as finger-posts upon the path to degredation, that honest souls may be warned from destruction. And you wish to die? *You?* My prayer is that you may live a thousand years—until you become as loathsome to yourself as you have become to me. Kill you? No, that is an honor I reserve for your lover, Lady Keith! Tell me where he is—tell me where I may find him. It is *his* death I want—his, not yours—Delilah!"

CHAPTER LIV.

"WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF MARTHA BOGGS."

FOR the first time, the awful apathy of despair, which had fallen upon her in the first moment of their meeting, melted away before the fire and fury of his final words, and, realizing, with a sense of horror too deep to be expressed by the tongue, she flung herself directly in his path, and threw wide her arms, barring his way with a living cross.

"Alaric!" she cried, in an awful voice—"Alaric, you must not do it! you shall not do it!"

"What! has the fire not quite burnt itself 'out yet?" he exclaimed, with a short, dry laugh. "Are there still some warm gleams hidden in the ashes? And is there still one tender spot in the heart's holy of holies for the man who was once your lover? Stand aside, and let me pass out! The man is here—in Leith, in the neighborhood of Glاندore Court—and, though he bury himself in the caverns of the earth, I'll find and drag him forth!"

"Alaric, you must not!" she panted, breathlessly. "No matter where he is, nor what he is, you must not meet that man. You shall not risk falling a prey to the sleepless cunning of gypsy vengeance, nor stain your own dear hands with the blood of a fellow-creature. Whatever disgrace you bear has come to you through me; and, though you tear me limb from limb, I will stand here and fight you to the last before any act of your own shall deepen this disgrace, or the stain of murder fall upon your name. Let my blood be shed, if blood alone can wipe out the misery I have brought you, but meet Gypsy Jock you never shall. Never—never!"

"Stand aside!" he roared. "I do not wish to again lay a hand upon you—either in violence or in tenderness; but if you bar my way to that man, I'll dash you from my path, and reach him if I have to step across your body! Stand aside! do you hear me?"

"I never will!" she answered, in a voice of resolution. "Never, Alaric—I swear it! Stop! do not try to pass me or I will scream for help. You shall not meet him. See! I will not let you go."

She had come nearer while she was speaking, but with those final words, she threw herself upon his bosom; her outstretched arms closing suddenly, locked themselves about his neck with all the fierce strength of despair, and so:

"You shall not do it!" she cried again. "I'll hold you living, I'll hold you dead, Alaric, but reach Gypsy Jock, I swear that you never shall!"

He uttered one wrathful, loud-voiced cry, and seizing her locked arms, wrenched and tore at them in a furious effort to be free; and catching sight of the unequal struggle, my lady knew that her time had come.

Covered by the scuffling sounds and the excited voices of the two participants in this unequal struggle, her foot-falls gave forth no sound as she moved to the clump of palms, her white arm slipped like a flash through the clustering foliage, her eager hand touched the iron wheel, gripped, turned it, and it one instant a dazzling sheet of gaslight flashed through the leafy aisles of the conservatory and illumined it from end to end.

For a second those struggling figures stood locked together under the glare of that penetrating light; for a second theirs were the only voices that sounded, theirs the only feet that scuffled on the marble pavement; then from the darkness without the crystal walls of the conservatory there arose a sudden cry, and after it:

"Marco, Marco! See! it is she!" roared forth the voice of Gypsy Jock. "I have found her again—found her and him—him—him!"

And with those words there came a clatter of hasty footsteps across the terrace, the figure of Gypsy Jock leaped through the open doorway of the conservatory, and came bounding toward the struggling pair, with Marco following hastily upon his heels.

A dramatist, planning carefully an exciting situation, could have arranged nothing more startling than this climax of my lady's plot, and the way it was carried out.

Warned by that cry, and recognizing the voice that uttered it, Zillah glanced up, saw him as he bounded toward her, and, breaking out of her husband's arms, fled toward the advancing man.

"Zillah!" he cried, as she approached him. "Zillah, my beloved! At last—at last—I find thee!"

She gave no heed to his words, but darting toward him with outstretched arms and white face gleaming in the gaslight:

"Fly! Jock, fly!" she screamed. "Save yourself and spare him, and I will be a gypsy again!"

My lord, hearing that cry and being released, turned like a flash, and as he moved forward to spring upon his foe, my lady's slim, white hand reached out and shut off the gas; in the darkness my lord did not see that her foot was placed so that he could not avoid tripping over it, and rushing blindly onward, stumbled and sprawled headlong upon the pavement, where he lay for a moment or two bruised and stunned by the fall.

"Go!" whispered my lady, as she clutched her father's arm. "Everything now lies in your escape with Jock. Away!—away!—quickly!"

"Come! come!—there's danger here!" exclaimed Marco, as he gripped his companion's arm and dragged him to the door. "Away, Jock, away. To-morrow thou shalt have Zillah again. But to-night—safety!"

The only answer was an exultant cry, and then, as though he too realized what peril menaced the gypsy poacher found on Lord Glandore's domain, Jock bolted out of the door after him, and so rushed headlong into the midst of half a dozen game-keepers.

"Nail 'em, my lads, nail the pair of 'em!" sang out a voice that Lady Blanche recognized with despair as belonging to Bowtry, the head game-keeper. "Boggs was right, the shrewd one—they *are* gypsies, and they warn't a-poaching! Now, then, turn on your bull's-eyes, lads, and let's see what they've been doing in the green-'ouse."

Instantly there was the clicking sound of the slides being pushed back from have a dozen bull's-eye lanterns, the darkness was changed to light; and, glancing up with a sick sensation of despair and failure, my lady had the mortification of seeing her father and Gypsy Jock dragged back into the conservatory, surrounded by half a dozen stalwart game-keepers, and, following close on their heels, with glowing countenance and exultant eyes, Martha Boggs and—Lord Glandore.

Nor did the surprise end here, for, as if by preconcerted signal, at the moment this party entered the rear door of the conservatory, another, representing all the household servants, headed by Lady Elsdale, made their appearance through the front doorway, and in one moment the lights were up, the place was filled, and my lady, looking pale as death, found herself standing close to the spot where Lord Keith lay moaning upon the floor, and the center of a crowd which viewed her with stern and bitter looks.

It was toward Zillah, however, that Lord Glandore made his first movement, but even before he touched her:

"Catch her quick, Bowtry!" exclaimed Martha Boggs, excitedly, "and if she is popped in jail before morning, as true as I live, I'll say 'yes' to what you've asked me so often, and marry you afore the week's out!"

And to Lady Blanche's infinite amazement, Bowtry sprung forward quickly, clapped a heavy hand upon her delicate little wrist, and she awoke with a start to the astonishing discovery that the person whom the head game-keeper had been ordered to "catch quick," was her own pretty, wicked little self.

"Take your hand from my wrist this instant," she blazed indignantly as she whirled around and scorched Bowtry with a look of insulted pride. "Are you intoxicated, or what is the meaning of this outrage, Lord Glandore?"

"Don't ask him—ask *me*!" exclaimed Martha Boggs, bustling forward and facing her. "Oh, you wicked little hussy, you! Oh, you nasty little *cat*! to eat a body's bread, and then set traps for 'em like this! So you was a-goin' to make out as Miss Inez was once a livin' gypsy, was you, you nasty little snake? And you want to know what it all means, do you, mum? Well, I'll take a pre-

cious good heap o' joy in tellin' you that it means, as I was a-settin' behind them there curtains in the bow-window of the library, when you fetched Lord Keith in there to tell him lies about that there letter as you stole, and as soon as *you* ups and outs, why, I ups and outs arter you, and I goes straight to Lord Glandore, and tells him what a nasty, connivin', sneaking little hussy you really are, Miss Maggie Talford—*that was!* So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, with the compliments of Martha Boggs!"

CHAPTER LV.

I WILL UNSEX MYSELF FOR THIS.

"OH, take me to England, Robert—take me to Glandore Court, and let me stand face to face with the old earl, and, if I do not then prove myself to be Inez Catheron, the heiress, I will believe with you that I have been the victim of a delusion, and will never refer to the subject again so long as we both live!"

These were the words Inez Catheron had uttered, as she sunk down on her knees in Robert Herndon's *atelier*, and lifted her pale, beseeching face to his.

For a moment the young artist hung his head and remained silent, his lips quivering and his eyes growing moist.

"Oh, will you give me no answer, no promise, Robert?" resumed Inez, clasping her hands and swaying to and fro in a transport of agony and despair. "Oh, why will you persist in believing me insane without attempting to prove if there be not some truth in this thing you call my fancy? Oh, Robert, best and truest of friends! is it just to condemn me on no other evidence than your own belief?"

She arose with a faint, gasping cry, and stood for a second, trembling and silent, with both hands clasped over her eyes; then a dull red wave swept across her face and vanished—left it deathly pale—she made a sudden movement, as though the very desperation of the situation had made her reckless, and so reaching out both hands came toward him again.

"Robert!" she cried, in a choking voice, "Robert! you told me once that you loved the original of that picture, and that your life, since the hour you saw her, held but one thought, wish, prayer—to win her for your wife! I am *not* that woman. As God hears me, I swear to you that I am not! But tell me, Robert, tell me: Do you love the image well enough to offer her the heart which you

gave to the reality? Would you be content to win me for your wife, as you once hoped to win her?"

"Content!" he cried out, in a voice of rapture. "Oh, Inez, you are all my world and all my heaven, dear! Could I ask more, if it were yours to give? My life holds only you, my queen, and image or reality—call yourself which you will—I love you, dear, 'first, best, and over all the world!'"

"And you would win me, Robert—win me for your wife?"

"Win you, dear, and hold the world well lost, so that you alone were mine!" he answered, passionately. "God made us for each other, dear, and night and day I pray that he will lead your heart to mine. Some day such a love as mine may work in your heart an echo which is mute to-day. Some day I may win and wear you, Inez, and when that day comes life will have nothing left to give me, since all its joys are mine!"

For one moment she stood motionless—the color coming and going in her face, and her whole frame trembling; then, drooping her head, as though ashamed of usurping man's prerogative:

"Robert," she said, "Robert, that day is now within your grasp. Take me to Glandore Court, grant me the one great favor that I ask at your hands, and if I fail to prove myself what I claim to be, in that, the hour which brings the downfall of my delusion, I promise that I will become your—your wife!"

"Inez!"—he sprung toward her with a sharp and sudden cry, and took her unresisting form in his arms. "Inez, you mean it, dear? Oh, say it once again, my darling—say it while I hold you in these arms, my love."

"Take me to Glandore Court," she repeated, huskily, "and if I fail to prove myself Lord Glandore's granddaughter, I will become—your wife."

"I accept the terms—I accept the terms!" he cried out, with a laugh, so full of happiness that it seemed hysterical. "Oh, mother! mother! do you hear? Do you comprehend? All that I have prayed for is mine at last. She will be my wife, mother—Inez will be my wife."

Then he fell to kissing the bright golden head that drooped upon his breast, and in her pity for him, and her sorrow for that day when there must come an awakening of which he dreamed not now, Inez had not the heart to resist nor to rob him of this poor reward.

Laughing and weeping and acting, as she herself put it, "as though she were a happy old fool," Margaret Hern-don came forward, and taking from her son's arms the

weak, frail girl he held, drew her down upon her own motherly old bosom and kissed her a dozen times.

"Oh, I am so happy, my dear, for his sake and for my own!" she said. "To think that I shall really have a daughter, and that that daughter should be you, Inez! Ah, I shall be the proudest mother in the world, for who could have such noble children as mine?"

Then she fell to laughing in a half-hysterical way—for she, too, saw but the one possible issue to the undertaking—and was so delighted with the happy prospect that Inez had not the heart to blunt her joy by reminding her of how the promise was given.

So the affair was settled. It would take a fortnight, at least, for Robert to earn the money necessary to defray their traveling expenses—for, if only for proprieties' sake, it was decided that his mother should accompany them—then, too, it could not reasonably be supposed that Inez would be strong enough to endure the fatigue of the journey, without risking a relapse, if they attempted to start sooner; and at length, after much discussion, the important day was set, and just two weeks from that very morning was named as the time when they were to start for Glandore Court.

CHAPTER LVI.

"FIRE THAT IS CLOSEST KEPT BURNS MOST OF ALL."

THEY were not unhappy for Inez, those two weeks of waiting—indeed, in the after years of her life she often looked back to them with a tender recollection as being among the brightest days and the sweetest experiences she had ever known, for each morning that brought her nearer to the day of her departure, brought with it some tender act of Robert's or his mother's to endear to her this quiet life and peaceful home, where the sanctity of honest toil, brightened by honest love, clung as a benediction, and made each morn round out to evening in tender harmoniousness and perfect peace.

All day long Mrs. Herndon hummed to herself as she bustled about performing her household duties—and occasionally finding time to peep into Robert's *atelier*, where her son sat before his easel, whistling as he painted, or, when Inez was with him, carrying on a happy conversation with her as she sat in her deep, soft chair beside his artist's stool, and watched him create the picture which was to furnish the money for their journey—and all day long the doves cooed in the cote Robert had built for them in the now desolate garden of the little villa, as though

they, too, enjoyed the perfect peace of this perfectly peaceful home under the gray, Parisian sky.

That she did not love this great, handsome, noble-hearted American who was working like a slave to gratify her wish—and to marry him without loving him would be a crime against her womanhood and a wrong to him—Inez Catheron was painfully aware, and each day as the full depth and breadth of his love was made manifest to her there grew up within her heart a great pity for him, a great sorrow, that in return for so much, she could give but so little, and gradually—so gradually that she knew not when it first took shape—she began shrinking from the thought of that day when his dream must be shattered by the reality, and this peaceful, perfect life end for her as well as for him.

It was impossible not to be touched by his devotion, even though she could not return it, for each morning that was ushered in brought her some tender recollection of his love, whether it was but some verses clipped from a magazine, a simple flower placed beside her plate, or some small offering of fruit which he had purchased at the market-place during his early morning walk.

His love seemed to fill the very atmosphere and make the sunshine seem brighter as it streamed in through the little diamond-paned windows and flooded the *atelier*, and after awhile Inez took to spending all of the time there, just because it was so bright and because—well, because she knew that he liked to have her sit beside him while he worked, and the least she could do was to make him as happy as it was in her power to do!

At least that was the way she reasoned with herself, mark you! and surely she should be the best judge of her own motives.

But Robert took this spurious metal for real gold; Robert's mother being older and wiser, refrained from showing how she took it, only that she found less time to peep into the *atelier*, nowadays, and more work to do below stairs—so much more in fact that she kept out of sight altogether and nothing but the pots, kettles and pans enjoyed her confidence regarding her motive for fluttering about the kitchen all day long when she might just as well have taken her knitting up to her son's studio and increased the small gathering there by one.

At first Inez had remarked her protracted absence, and remonstrated with her for "working herself to death," but after awhile she grew quite accustomed to being left with Robert all day long, and finally ceased to notice it, for Robert himself kept her thoughts occupied with his

perennial good nature, and his constant allusion to the life they would lead when she had "sold her wedding dower—'La Fleur de Foret'—and they were all living together in a certain bijou villa which he had his eye upon, and which lay close to the outskirts of Paris in the prettiest little spot imaginable;" and between the discussion of this happy prospect and the tender pity which his love had awakened in her heart, she really had no time to think of anything else.

So the days slipped along and the dream went on, until the picture was finished and sent to its future owner. Somehow, it seemed to Inez as though it hurt her when she saw it go—as though it were part of herself; for had she not watched it grow beneath Robert's brush? and the sight of the bare easel, when he removed the painting, sent a faint pang of regret through her heart, for it seemed like looking on a dead face and remembering the life and light which once had glorified it.

But the picture went to its owner, the money came in return—the money which was to take her back to Glandore Court and the sumptuous life she had lived there; and yet when Robert came in and threw the roll of bank-notes into her lap, she was painfully conscious that she could not share his joy. For now this quiet, peaceful life was over forever, and— Oh, the pity of it, the sorrow and the pity for *him*—the end must come, and these dear old friends and this dear home come never again across the threshold of her life.

Long and late into the last night she was to pass under the roof-tree of Rue de Angès, she lay upon her pillow staring into the darkness and thinking over her life during the past few weeks—trying to feel glad that she was going to Glandore; trying not to feel pained and distressed at the thought of leaving this humble little home; trying not to think of Robert's grief nor to picture Robert's face when the end should come, but failing so miserably, that when at last she dropped asleep, her head and heart alike ached, and her pillow was wet with tears.

They were to start for Calais at seven o'clock in the morning, in order to catch the noon packet for Dover, but long before that hour Inez was up and dressed, and was wandering about from room to room, taking a last look at the dear, familiar objects, and silently bidding them farewell.

"Oh! let me see the dear old house once more, mother," she murmured, when all was over, and they were seated in the fiacre which Robert had secured to convey them to the railway station. "How pretty it is—so much prettier

than I thought at first. Oh, mother, mother! it does seem so hard to leave it."

Then drawing down her veil to hide the tears which flooded her eyes, she sunk back in her seat as the fiacre rolled away to the depot.

The journey to Calais was an uneventful one, and by noon the little party was standing on the deck of the packet, and watching the shores of *La Belle France* fall into the distance as the vessel steamed over the short, choppy waves of the English Channel.

It was a bright, sunshiny day, and the deck was crowded with passengers—so crowded, in fact, that a gentleman, who was trying to make his way to a spot where he could place a steamer-chair for a frail, wasted creature, who clung feebly to his arm, and tottered after him, was jostled by the throng, and losing his balance, fell heavily against Robert.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, with an accent distinctly American, as he regained his footing. "I trust I did not hurt you, sir?"

"Not in the least, I assure you!" responded Robert, good-humoredly. "The vessel rolls so heavily that it is difficult for one to keep his feet with——" Here his eyes met those of the stranger, a look of pleasure overspread his face, and then: "Why, Mr. Narkland!" he exclaimed delightedly. "Upon my word, this is an unexpected pleasure!"

"Eh? What? Well, upon my word, if it isn't young Bob Herndon."

"The very same, sir, and glad to run across you again. Mother, don't you recognize this gentleman? It is Mr. Narkland—Mr. Maverick Narkland, the lawyer from Pittsburg. The gentleman who bought my first picture."

"Dear me! so it is, Robert!" exclaimed Mrs. Herndon, as she bustled forward. "I am very—very happy to meet you again, Mr. Narkland. But what in the world brings you to Europe?"

"Business, dear Mrs. Herndon—business with a sick client; and—oh, I beg a thousand pardons"—as a nervous hand grasping his arm for support recalled his thoughts to his companion, "may I place a chair here for this lady, Bob? It seems as clear a place as any."

"Yes, place it here, by all means, sir!" responded Robert. Then, in an undertone: "Is that the client?" he added, as Mr. Narkland arranged the steamer-chair, and assisted the lady to become seated.

"Yes," returned Mr. Narkland in the same tone. "Had no end of a bother in finding her, too. Big American es-

tate fell into my hands to settle; had to trace the 'next of kin;' found her an invalid living in an out-of-the-way town in France; and so feeble that, by George! I had to come over and take her to——"

He stopped short, and a pallor crept over his face; for at that moment Inez had turned, and the wind blowing back her veil, revealed her features to him.

"Good Heaven! what a resemblance!" he gasped. "If the dead could return to life, I would believe that Inez Catheron stood before me!"

At the mention of that name, Inez came sharply forward.

"Oh, sir! I am Inez Catheron!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "I—I have never seen you before, but if you know aught of me or my people——"

"I was Kingdon Catheron's solicitor at the time he was murdered!" interrupted Mr. Narkland, "and I know the history of the family from A to Z. Are you then one of the poor little innocents who were orphaned by that brutal murder which——"

He stopped short, remembering the promise he had given Lady Morford.

"I am *the* one—the only one!" responded Inez, excitedly. "I know very little of my father's history; because—because soon after his death, my aunt, Lady Clara Morford, brought me to Glandore Court, where I——"

The sentence was fated never to be finished; for with a cry like the wailing of a wounded animal, Mr. Narkland's sick client suddenly sat bolt upright in her chair, and reached out her hands to Inez.

"Lady Clara Morford!" she repeated in a voice of intense agitation. "Ah, Heaven! am I to hear something at last? Sir Robert Morford's wife was named Clara—so *he* said, and Sir Robert Morford was his most intimate friend. Oh, speak, my dear young lady! speak, in Heaven's name! Did you, oh, *did* you ever hear of a man called Norris Hay?"

"Lord Norris Hay, of Eastwood, do you mean, madame?" responded Inez. "Yes, I know who you mean, and have seen him often."

Again that wild cry sounded, and again the woman's white hand outstretched.

"Oh, tell me of him! tell me of him!" she panted, excitedly. "Heartless and cruel as he was, now that a fortune has come to me, and, in position, if not in birth, I shall be his equal, he shall do me justice, come what may! Tell me where he is—tell me where I may find him! I will not leave England until I have had my rights!"

"Lord Norris Hay is dead, madame!" returned Inez. "He was killed on the hunting field four years ago; and his widow, Lady Blanche——"

"His widow!" shrieked the woman, in intense agitation. "Take me to her—take me to any woman who dare claim that title! How can she be his widow when I was his wife? I—I—the woman he deserted like the coward he was!"

CHAPTER LVII.

"ART THOU A SPIRIT OF HEALTH OR GOBLIN DAM'D?"

THERE are some pictures which the pen may never hope to reproduce, some scenes which language is unable to paint with even the faintest likeness to the reality; and that scene in the conservatory at Glandore Court was one of them.

Shocked and startled by this complete overthrow of her schemes, and horrified by the words spoken by faithful old Martha Boggs, Lady Blanche Hay shot one despairing glance at her miserable father, and then dropped down upon a rustic seat, trembling, powerless, dumb!

"Oh! *that* takes the wind out of your sails, doesn't it? you wicked, connivin' little hussy you!" exploded anew the irate Martha Boggs. "You didn't think as you'd be come up with in this way, did you, mum? You didn't think as you'd ever live to be called Maggie Talford again; 'cause why—you didn't know as there was a person livin' at Glandore Court as knowed your mother and your wicked old grandmother, and that there miserable, sneakin' ole villain, your father! Oh, you needn't scowl at *me*, Mr. Mark Talford, or whatever you may call yourself nowadays. You'd ought to be took out and hung, feet uppermost, for a month o' Sundays! that's what you'd ought, you wicked, *wicked* old villain you! and if I had the sayin' o' what 'ld be done to the pair o' you, I'd take that darter o' yourn by the hair of her head, and——"

"Hush, Boggs, hush!" interrupted Lord Glandore at this juncture. "Let me deal with these people—you attend to Lady Keith."

He strode forward as he spoke, and pausing before Lady Blanche, looked her squarely in the face.

"So this is the creature you really are at heart, is it? he said sternly. "Truthful as I knew Boggs to be, I could scarcely credit her words when she brought news of this wicked conspiracy, and told me what she had overheard in the library. You snake—you lying, crawling,

slandrous snake—to eat my salt and spread a lie like this against the purity and honor of my grandchild. Oh, you shall suffer for this, woman! It would be a crime to let you go free and not warn the world against you, and before I will allow you to imperil the peace and soil the reputation of other women as you would have soiled Lady Keith's, I will prosecute you for slander, and blazon your infamy from end to end of the kingdom, till honest folks may know you for the thing you are, and every door be closed against you to the end of your miserable life!"

My lady set her teeth hard, and a bitterly malicious look flashed across her pretty, insolent face.

No need to deny the accusation, no hope of recovering the ground she had lost.

The game was over—that she knew—and there was nothing left her but to lay down her mask and face the ordeal openly.

"You had better *not* adopt such a course as that, my Lord Glandore," she said, through her shut teeth. "You have learned enough to know that I can be a dangerous enemy, and to expose me as you so *amiably* propose may involve the reputation of another. You must *catch* your hare before you begin to skin it, my lord—it's much the surer plan!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the old earl, glancing as he spoke at Lord Keith, who had now dragged himself to his feet and stood clinging to the arm of his valet for support. "Is it possible that you can still believe that your slanderous lies can have any weight with the man whose happiness you have almost wrecked? Keith, look up and tell this Jezebel what you think of her now!"

For answer, his lordship glanced at Lady Blanche, and the horror and contempt of that glance passes all telling.

"Oh, be sure that the feeling is mutual, my lord," returned her ladyship, laughing derisively, yet flushing in spite of herself under the loathing embodied in his look. "I learned to hate you that night at Carn Ruth, and I haven't forgotten the lesson, even though I have failed upon the very threshold of its successful issue. You hear what this amiable old party threatens to do to me, don't you? Tell him how dangerous it may prove, and advise him not to do it. You won't, eh?"—with a thin, jeering laugh. "Then let the pleasant task be mine. Sue me for slander at your peril, my lord—expose me if you dare—for, as pitilessly as you deal with me, I will deal with you in return. Take a fool's advice, and let my father and me go free; for, in the hour you attempt to prosecute me, I will ruin Lady Keith's reputation. She has admitted

some few things to her husband which would not look well in the public prints."

"It is a lie!" exclaimed the old earl, indignantly. "You have trumped up a pretty story upon the strength of the letter you advised me not to mention, and then stole from me to consummate your own devilish work. But if you hope to frighten me off, abandon that hope now and forever. Your horrible attempt to fasten a slander upon Lady Keith, by vainly endeavoring to connect her name with that of some low hound of a gypsy——"

"Is it a vain endeavor, my lord?" broke in her ladyship, with a faint, purring laugh. "Is it a slander, after all? Ask her husband if she has not admitted it to him, and then ask that man—Gypsy Jock—what *he* knows of Lady Keith."

The earl's face flushed the deep, sullen crimson of stormy wrath, then slowly paled, and, turning, he faced Lord Keith.

"Why are you silent at such a time as this, Keith?" he demanded, hoarsely. "Have you forgotten the tie which binds you to that poor, stricken creature lying there senseless, and, therefore, unable to defend her name from the venom of this woman's tongue? Have you no ears to hear—no heart to feel—no voice to lift for the honor of your wife, that you stand here silent, and this Jezebel defame her? Do you hear what she says of *you*?—OF *YOU*?—and you are speechless still. She says that your wife has confessed these foul charges in your presence. Tell her that she lies, Keith."

"If he *can*, you mean, my lord!" cut in her ladyship, with one of her horrible, soundless laughs.

"Tell her that she lies, Keith!" exclaimed the old earl, his angry voice thundering with passion. "Do you hear what I say? Tell that creature that she lies!"

Pale almost to ghastliness, Lord Keith raised his head and then slowly shook it.

"I—I cannot!" he answered, in a choking voice. "I cannot, because she speaks the truth!"

"What!"

"I repeat it: she tells the truth! Inez confessed it to me!"

My lady's tinkling laughter was the only sound.

Dumb with amazement, the old earl fell back a step and stared at Lord Keith. There was one second of utter silence, then:

"For God's sake, Keith, what horrible juggle is this?" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "Inez confessed to you that she once lived among gypsies, and with that man?"

"Yes," he answered, huskily. "As God hears me—yes!"

Again that utter silence fell.

The earl glanced at Lord Keith, then at the pale, deathly face of Zillah—who was now slowly reviving—then at Gypsy Jock—and finally, with a cry like the sound of a roaring brute, he snatched a gun from one of the game-keepers and leveled it straight at Jock's head.

"Take back your lies, you rascal!" he roared. "Take them back this instant, or as surely as there is a God above us I'll pull the trigger."

But Jock never flinched, and the color never even for one second left his cheek.

"Shoot, if it please you!" he said, in a voice of sullen defiance. "As well have my body slain by you, after my soul has been torn by *him*!"—glancing bitterly at Lord Keith. "He has left me nothing to live for since he stole her from me, and—— If you'll only kill *him*, first, I'll let you tear me piecemeal, if you will!"

"Take back your lies!" vociferated Lord Glandore. "No dog of a gypsy shall ever lift his voice against my grandchild, and live!"

"Your grandchild!" repeated Jock, with a sullen scowl. "What have I said against your grandchild? Why should I speak against Miss Catheron? I never saw her in my life. And what wrong am I guilty of against *you*, or against your grandchild, that you fly at me like a tiger for simply loving that girl there? I have as much right to love her as any infernal aristocrat in the kingdom; and until that coward—Lord Keith—stole her from me, and taught her to hate the gypsies with whom she passed the happiest days of her life——"

"You lie—you lie—you lie!" broke in Lord Glandore, excitedly. "Miss Catheron never herded with such cattle as you—never in her life!"

"Who's speaking of Miss Catheron? I'm talking of that girl—there!"

"And that girl is my grandchild—Lord Keith's wife, you rascal!"

"It's a lie!" responded Jock. "Do you think you can make a fool of me like this? I don't know what game you're trying to play, Lord Glandore, but I do know that you can't hoodwink me! That girl's no more your grandchild than I am—she's Zillah, the gypsy, Zillah, the spirit child, and a daughter of the Romany race—ask her if you won't believe my word—ask her and see if she'll deny it before me!"

Lord Glandore had just opened his lips to make a just-

ly indignant response, but at that moment a wailing, heart-broken cry rung suddenly forth, there was the rustle of a silken robe, the patter of a hasty footstep, and Zillah's figure came between him and Gypsy Jock.

"Don't shoot—don't shoot, for God's sake!" she panted nervously. "Oh, let all the sin and all the remorse be mine. Don't take a human life for my sake, Lord Glاندore! Spare this man—spare him for the sake of a guilty creature who is not worth the sacrifice you would make!"

"Inez!"

"Spare him—spare him, I beg of you!" she cried out wildly. "Spare him, my lord, and listen to the tale he tells—listen, but, oh, let me not be here, for life is done for me!"

With that she seized the barrel of the gun and forced it up so violently that it was discharged by the action and sent its bullet crashing through the crystal dome of the conservatory, then, with one last heart-rung cry, she darted to the open door, dashed out into the darkness, and so—was gone!

For just a moment the old earl paused—startled, irresolute, overcome—then flinging the gun from him, he darted after her.

"Come back!" he cried. "Come back and refute this slander—come back and face this man!"

He knew only the direction she had taken, for in the darkness he could see nothing; and dashing after her, he raced along the footpath, rounded the angle of the house, and so collided with a woman's figure which in the faint light which penetrated the crystal walls of the conservatory, he saw and recognized.

"Grandpa!" she had time to utter only that one word ere he caught her in his frantic grasp and dragged her to the door.

"Come back!" he roared. "Come back and face that man, Inez, and deny his awful charge!"

He gave her no chance to reply.

The open door was near, and whirling her through it, he set her face to face with Gypsy Jock.

"Tell him he lies," he roared, in a voice of furious passion. "Tell him that he lies, and swear to me that you have never seen his devil's face before!"

"I never have—I never have!" came back the swift response. "Oh, grandpa, grandpa, do you know me after all? Robert! Mother! Mr. Narkland! Come in; come in and see me vindicated!"

With a sharp and sudden cry the old earl turned—they

all turned—and glanced at the woman who stood before them.

It was Inez Catheron's voice they heard; Inez Catheron's face they saw, but not as they had seen it a moment since.

That Inez Catheron who had darted from them and fled into the darkness, was clad in a dinner-dress of glistening white silk; this Inez Catheron who stood before them now—who spoke to them with the same voice, looked at them with the same eyes, confronted them with the same face—*this* Inez Catheron was garbed in a gray cloth costume that was stained and soiled with travel.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE TANGLED THREADS.

FOR one second there was silence of the most intense character, as they all stood and stared in blank amazement at that dark-robed figure which stood there in the light of the conservatory lamps, looking at them with Lady Keith's face and Lady Keith's eyes; then there was the sound of hurried footsteps coming up the walk, up the stone terrace, and through the open doorway, and presently Robert Herndon, looking pale and excited, dashed into the conservatory.

"Inez, my darling, who was it that seized you so rudely and dragged you away?" he exclaimed, as he hastened to her side. "You were so eager to enter by the rear door, when you heard the sound of voices and saw the lights streaming from the windows of the conservatory, that you had darted away from me before I divined your intention, dear, and you were still so far in advance of me when I saw some man dash forward and lay violent hands upon you that I could not distinguish the fellow's face. Who was it, dear? Show me the man, that I may teach him what it costs to deal roughly with *you*!"

"It was grandpapa—it was Lord Glandore," she answered, with a half hysterical laugh. "See! there he is, Robert—there! there! and my claim is established at last, for he has recognized me, Robert—do you hear—do you understand?—recognized me and called me by name!"

"Recognized you!"

The words dropped huskily from Robert's lips, and a sensation of utter despair swept across him; but as he glanced about and saw that, while there was a look of consternation upon the faces of all, there was nothing akin to such joy and such excitement as he felt would be

natural if Inez's claim were true, and she *had* come back to the arms of those who loved her; and attributing her last words to yet another freak of her distorted imagination, he took heart again.

But in that momentary look which he had cast over the throng about him, the artist had seen and recognized two faces, and striding forward quickly, extended his hand.

"I am pleased to meet you again, Lord Keith, even though it be under most distressing circumstances!" he exclaimed. "You recognize me, do you not, sir? I am Robert Herndon, the man who painted 'La Fleur de Foret!'"

"I recognize you—yes!" returned his lordship, as he gripped the American's hand, "and—although I cannot understand what strange freak of fate brings you to Glandore Court, and at this dreadful time of all others, you—you are welcome, sir, since you can, perhaps, aid us in clearing away much that is mysterious in a truly horrible affair. A fearful charge has been brought against my—against Lady Keith, Mr. Herndon——"

"Against Lady Keith!" repeated Robert, glancing inquiringly at Lady Blanche Hay—whom he recognized as the woman to whom his lordship had been so attentive in those far-off days at Carn Ruth—and then, glancing back at Inez, and interpreting Lord Keith's remark as applying to the claim she had made—"I am sure that her ladyship will forgive her accuser when she understands the sorrowful truth, and—tell me, sir, is that the Earl of Glandore standing there and staring at my poor deluded darling?"

Until this moment Lord Glandore had not spoken. He stood like one under a stupor or a spell, and stared in wonder at the miraculous change which appeared to have been wrought in regard to the clothing worn by his granddaughter; but now, catching Robert's final words, and echoing that startled cry with which Lord Keith himself greeted them, he faced about suddenly and scowled upon the young artist.

"*Your* darling, you infernal rascal!" he roared. "How dare you apply a term of endearment to one who has nothing in common with you or yours—whoever you may be? Have you too joined in this conspiracy to injure the reputation of my grandchild? Speak! or it will be worse for you!"

"*Sir!*" exclaimed Robert, clinching his hands and facing the old earl with a look of indignation.

"Speak, do you hear me, you scoundrel?" vociferated

his lordship, passionately. "I want to know what part you have been chosen to fill in this slanderous game of Lady Blanche Hay's, and if you do not soon loosen your tongue, and that, too, voluntarily, by the Lord Harry, I'll prove to you that the Leith jail has room enough for you as well as your fellow-conspirators, and——"

"Stop where you are, my friend!" broke in Robert, excitedly; "you are in your own house, it is true, but if common politeness does not teach you to respect a guest—howsoever unwelcome—I will teach you that you must and shall respect *me*!"

"Robert!" interposed Inez, plucking his sleeve and looking up into his face with a glance of wild entreaty, "Robert, for Heaven's sake do not harm him. If you cannot remember that he is grandpa, oh, at least recollect that you are young and strong, and he——"

"He trades upon his age and infirmity as a barrier from behind which he hopes to insult me with impunity, does he?" interrupted Robert indignantly. "It is true that your years offer you some protection"—this to Lord Glandore—"but they do not give you license to insult *me*, and if you repeat the offense, you're liable to have your nose pulled, my man!"

"Your *man*, you impertinent puppy!" roared the old earl, "your *lord*, you mean—I have a title by which it is customary for the rabble to address me!"

"If, by the rabble, you mean your hirelings, let them address you as 'my lord,' for that I never will!" responded Robert, drawing himself up, and throwing back his head with a trick like that of a defiant stag. "I am an American, sir—a son of the soil, born in a land where all men are equal, and nobility belongs only to those who win it by uprightness and honesty. I call no man 'my lord.' That title I reserve for Him who rules above, and who alone has the right to claim homage and reverence at a freeman's hands. I was prepared to be insulted, sir, when I came to this place, but my cause has been a just one, and I can bear even your abuse, so that I reach the goal for which I strive.

"It is not the first time you have treated me to insult, and my efforts in behalf of this dear, afflicted girl with scorn and indignation—born of your fancied right to be held as of the earth's elect, and so far above those whose only title is the honest one of man, that for one of these to address an inquiry to you is an act of presumption amounting almost to impudence. I repeat, sir, this is not the first time you have repulsed me with scorn, but—I assure you it shall be the last. I am Robert Herndon, sir, the man

who addressed you that letter of inquiry—which you so curtly answered—regarding a poor creature who was the victim of an hallucination in reference to the fate of your granddaughter, Lord Keith's wife; your curt response to that letter was at once ungentlemanly and unjust; and if after such an epistle I again venture to thrust myself upon your notice, understand that I do not do it willingly, but that it was to the interest of Inez——”

“Lady Keith, sir!” cut in Lord Glandore. “You are too familiar.”

“And you too hasty!” responded Robert. “It is not of Lady Keith I speak, sir. I refer to this dear girl beside me.”

“And I, also, refer to *her*! As my granddaughter, and as Lord Keith's wife, she has every right to be addressed by the title which——”

“Your ‘granddaughter!’ ‘Lord Keith's wife!’ This young lady!” exclaimed Robert, with a derisive laugh. “You must be mad, sir, to make such an assertion as that, and particularly——” this with a glance toward Lady Blanche——“when Lady Keith herself is present. If your memory is so wretched, and your sight so poor, that you do not recognize your own grandchild when you see her, permit me to direct your attention to the lady standing opposite. If the dear girl is Lord Keith's wife, will you have the goodness to tell me who is the lady there?”

“She is Lady Keith, sir, or else a memory, which never failed me yet, has played me a shabby trick at last.”

“*She* Lady Keith?” repeated the old earl, indignantly. “That woman sprung from my race? That woman my grandchild? She is Lady Blanche Hay, you blockhead, and your boasted memory *has* played you a trick at last!”

A sudden pallor swept over Robert's face, and his eyes flashed nervously toward Lord Keith.

“Is that true?” he exclaimed huskily. “That is the woman with whom your name was coupled at Carn Ruth, and—— Isn't she Miss Catheron, sir? Isn't that the woman you married?”

“No,” responded his lordship confusedly. “I—I had reasons for wishing to deceive you when I allowed you to believe that, Herndon. This woman is what the earl has called her—Lady Blanche Hay—and nothing to me—nothing! not even a friend!”

“Not your wife!” exclaimed Robert, with deep agitation——“not your wife, and yet you—you married Miss Inez Catheron, did you not? You married the Earl of Glandore's grandchild, and, if she, if that woman is not your wife, who then is?”

"The one who stands beside you!" responded his lordship. "Ask her, if you doubt my words. She will not deny *that*, I fancy, since the honorable name I gave into her keeping——"

"It is false!" cut in Robert, excitedly. "This girl your wife? This girl the bride who was with you at the Hotel de Paris? My God! Have you all gone mad, or have I? Inez—Inez, for the love of Heaven, dear, tell them who you are!"

"They have answered for me—they have answered for me, Robert!" responded Inez, with a burst of tears. "See! see; I am vindicated at last! You would not believe it, but now the truth is revealed. Call in your mother—call in Mr. Narkland, and let them see me acknowledged as what I truly am!"

"Inez!"

"Finish the name, Robert—finish the name, for it is mine by right, you see. I am Inez Catheron; I am the Earl of Glandore's granddaughter, but not your wife, after all, Alaric—not your wife, after all!"

A cry fluttered through the entire gathering as she made that startling declaration—a cry in which my Lady Blanche Hay and her rascally father joined, for now, but not until now did the truth come home to them.

"Lost—all lost!" murmured Lady Blanche, under her breath, as she dropped helplessly into a seat and stared, with dull, lifeless eyes, at the girl who stood by Robert Herndon's side. "It is not Zillah—it is Inez—and all is over now!"

CHAPTER LIX.

"DOWN, SPECTER, DOWN! I'LL NOT BELIEVE!"

CONFUSION reigned.

Robert's voice was the first to break the spell.

"In the name of Heaven, will somebody tell me what juggle is this?" he gasped. "Have you all gone mad? Do you all share the mania of this poor, deluded girl? She is not Inez Catheron, I tell you; for if Inez Catheron is the woman Lord Keith married, I swear that this is not she—this cannot be she—and I have evidence to prove it?"

"What evidence can you bring to dispute my word when I tell you it is true, Herndon?" exclaimed Lord Keith. "Do you think that Lord Glandore can be mistaken in his own grandchild? Do you think that I can be deceived in my own wife? Has she not herself acknowledged that she is Inez Catheron? And Inez Catheron was the girl I married."

"You did not—you did not!" protested Inez, excitedly. "You were duped and deceived, Alaric. You did not marry me. Before Heaven I swear it—you did *not* marry me!"

"Inez!" The voice was Lord Glandore's, and as he spoke, he stepped sharply forward and gripped her arm. "In the name of Heaven what folly is this? What do you hope to gain by such an absurd delaration as this?"

"Ah! what, indeed?" exclaimed Lord Keith, hollowly. "Is it some new trick by which you hope to clear yourself of the horrible things which you confessed to me to-night, or——"

"Confessed to *you* to-night, Alaric? I have confessed nothing to you—nothing! How could I when I was not here?"

"Oh, cease, cease, in pity's name!" he cried out, with a strident laugh. "I have been such a blind, besotted fool in your hands that I do not blame you for imagining you can still gull me; but as for the others—as for your aunt, your grandfather, and all—all who are about us—oh! have you the audacity to think that you can also gull them by this tomfoolery? If it suits you to deny now what you confessed but a few minutes since, do so; but, oh! in Heaven's name, do not be absurd enough to think that you can make us believe that we were all victims of a delusion, and did not see you when you stood here before us."

"But I tell you I was not here, Alaric—I swear that I was not!"

"*'Methinks the lady doth protest too much!'*" he quoted, with a smile of contempt. "Have you not already sworn that you are not my wife?"

"And both statements are true—both—upon my word of honor! Oh, will you not let me explain this terrible mistake? I am *no* man's wife, Alaric, much less yours. How could I be, when I was in France at the time you were married—in France, and the inmate of a mad-house?"

"Oh, cease—cease, in pity's name! You have perjured yourself enough as it is, without adding that bold lie to the list!"

"It is not a lie—it is true, sir; and if you will not take her word, you *must* take mine!" exclaimed Robert at this juncture. "I, myself, rescued her from a private mad-house on the Pampeau Road, near Fontainbleu, and for nearly six weeks she has been lying ill—under my mother's care—at the house in Paris, where you visited me. Oh, do you not recollect what I said to you about the original

of 'La Fleur de Foret,' Lord Keith? I told you I would search until I found her, and I have kept my word. This is she, sir—this is the beautiful gypsy I saw that night in Wales."

"No, Robert, no; I am Inez Catheron, and not a gypsy, and I never was in Wales in my life. Lord Glandore will swear to that. Won't you, grandpapa?"

Lord Glandore made no response. Indeed he scarcely heard, for all his attention was now given to Robert Herndon.

"And you say that Lady Keith has been an inmate of your home for the past six weeks?" he said, presently.

"No, not Lady Keith, but this dear girl beside me!" responded Robert. "I say it, and can prove it, sir—prove it by the aid of witnesses. When I rescued her from the madhouse, I found her possessed of a strange hallucination. She imagined herself the betrothed of Lord Keith, imagined that she was Miss Inez Catheron of Glandore Court, and that she had been abducted by some persons of whose identity she was ignorant, and——"

A strange, excited cry broke from Inez's lips at this juncture, and creeping closer to Robert, she nervously clutched his arm with one hand, and leveled the other at Marco, the gypsy.

"That is one of them!" she cried out excitedly. "Robert! Robert! that is one of the men who abducted me. Oh, grandpa, grandpa, believe what I am telling you is the truth. That is one of the men who stole me away from you, upon the night of the private theatricals. It—it was while I was dressing for the second act that some one brought me a letter. It purported to come from Alaric, and I believed it because I recognized his writing. If Martha Boggs is here, she will tell you that what I say about the letter is true."

"That I will, my lambie!" exclaimed Martha Boggs, as she bustled forward. "I was there when Springer fetched it to the room."

"Which it was Lady Blanche Hay as gave it to me, Martha," supplemented Springer, briskly. "I was carryin' an armful o' costumes for the play-actin' at the time, when she came on me in the hallway and poked the letter in my hand, sayin' I was to give it to Miss Inez, and to tell her as it was from Lord Keith!"

"And that letter!" broke in Lord Keith, excitedly. "Speak, Inez, what did that letter say?"

"It bade me come at once to the east wicket, as you wished to see me upon a matter of life and death. The signature was blotted out—as though you had upset the

ink bottle in your haste. I lost no time in going to the place designated, but when I arrived there, Alaric, I found instead of you, that man who stands there, and with him two others. They threw themselves upon me, and clapping a drugged handkerchief over my face, dragged me to a vehicle and thrust me in, and after that all is blank until I awoke and found myself in the asylum from which Robert rescued me. As he has told you, he took me to his mother, and I have been in her charge from that time to this!"

"And this woman who claims to have been at your side for six weeks," exclaimed Lord Glandore, excitedly. "The mother of this man; where is she, Inez? I want to see her and hear from her lips what proof she can bring to establish this hodge-podge of mysteries and lies!"

"My mother, sir, is somewhere in the grounds," said Robert. "We came from Calais this morning—Inez and I—in company with her and my friend Mr. Narkland, who was formerly solicitor to the late Mr. Kingdon Catheron. He is much interested in this affair—both he and a client who is traveling with him, and begged to be allowed to come with us to Glandore Court. They should have put in an appearance before this, for we were all coming up the Oak Walk in company, when Inez suddenly broke away and rushed toward this place. When I saw her struggling with somebody who was trying to drag her away, I naturally rushed after her, and it may be that my mother and her companions either lost their way or are awaiting for my return!"

"Good Heaven! Is this a dream or are we all mad, Keith?" exclaimed the old earl excitedly. "Do you hear what this man says? He is trying to convince me that Inez was coming to the house at the time I rushed out and seized her. Coming to the house, when you saw, when we all saw—that I rushed out to overtake her as she left it!"

"When I left it," repeated Inez, brokenly. "Oh, grandpa! grandpa! won't you believe me? I didn't leave it; I couldn't leave it when I wasn't here!"

"You were here!" he answered sternly. "God alone knows what reason you have for swearing to such a falsehood; but this I tell you—you were standing here, dressed in a white gown, and when you rushed out of that doorway to escape the charges brought against you; charges—which God pity us both!—I now believe must have some shadow of truth in them, since you have taken this desperate step to choke off the subject and elude inquiry, when you did this I followed you, and then——"

What then?

His lordship never mentioned it, for at this critical stage of affairs the sound of a woman's excited outcries echoed up the garden walk, the noise of a woman's flying feet pattered up the steps and across the terrace, and almost at the same moment:

"Robert, Robert! thank Heaven I have found you at last!" exclaimed Mrs. Herndon, as she entered in the doorway of the conservatory. "I have been looking for you everywhere, my son; and, oh, *why* are you lingering here when we need you so much? Come, quickly! come quickly! something strange and terrible has happened to Inez!"

"*Happened to Inez, mother?*"

"Yes, dear, yes; and you must come to her quickly. Mr. Narkland and I stumbled across her lying face downward in the path, and in a dead swoon. And the strangest thing of all is that she is all dressed in white silk, and looks——"

A scream brought the sentence to an abrupt close, for, even as she spoke, she turned and saw, the *real* Inez Catheron standing before her.

"Oh, Robert, Robert!" she panted, falling back against his body, and catching him with two frantic hands, "what does it mean, dear, what does it mean? Inez is *here* and Inez is *there*, and if I am not going mad and mistaking a phantom for a reality, they must be two separate and distinct women, but like enough for one!"

"Tell us where she is! tell us where she is!" exclaimed Lord Glandore.

Then, having obtained the necessary directions, he sent the servants scurrying away toward the Oak Walk, and two minutes later Lord Keith and Maverick Narkland—bearing between them the motionless figure of Zillah, and surrounded by a pack of servants who huddled together like a flock of terrified sheep—came back to the conservatory.

"Two of them!—two of them!" panted Martha Boggs, as she stood and stared at the beautiful, deathly face of Zillah. "Oh, my heart, my heart—two of them—and two were born that night!"

CHAPTER LX.

"FOR ALL IS DARK WHERE THOU ART NOT!"

WITH faltering steps and a face as white as the one that lay upon his shoulder, Lord Keith staggered forward gently and deposited the figure of his unconscious wife

upon one of the garden benches, sunk upon his knees beside her, and bowed his face between his palms.

Lord Keith had not yet lifted his head, and going softly to him, Inez dropped her hand upon his shoulder.

"Oh, Alaric!" she said, "Alaric, I am so sorry. After all you *did* love me, and I am sorry for your sake, my—*friend*. It was a shameful deceit, and only Heaven and this unconscious girl as yet know how it was practiced. Be brave—be firm, Alaric, for who knows what may come of this? Whatever she is, remember she is still your wife, and you have promised to love her as you once loved me!"

"Promised, and kept the promise, Inez!" he answered brokenly. "I have learned to love my wife far better than I ever loved my sweetheart!"

"I am glad of that, Alaric—oh, I am glad of that! Somehow, my heart warms to her, imposter though she be, and, I hope—oh, I *believe* that you will find her good and true."

"Ah, God! if you had heard the hideous charges they brought against her, you would pity me!" he groaned. "If it had not been for that, I could find strength to be happy and to bless the chance that linked my life to hers!"

She gave him no reply, but softly stealing to Lord Glandore's side, crept into his arms, and looked into his face.

"I am Inez—you believe that now, don't you, grandpa? I am Inez, and I was stolen away from you!"

"I believe it—yes," he answered. "But I cannot tell what terrible mystery lies behind this marvelous resemblance. Keith, poor boy! this is dreadful. See! your—your wife is reviving, and we shall soon know the worst."

"My wife—ah, Heaven! my wife! and she is *what*?" he echoed. "Her own lips shall tell me—her own words shall open heaven or hell for me to-night."

A faint, fluttering sigh disturbed the stillness as he spoke, and then, unveiling her eyes, his wife looked up and saw him.

"Alaric!" she moaned—"oh, Alaric, kill me! kill me! I have lost your love, my husband, and I prized it so dearly."

For answer he took both her hands in his, and, bending nearer, looked straight into her eyes.

"Tell me who you are?" he hoarsely said. "The fraud you have been practicing has been discovered. Inez Catheron the *real* has come home."

"Inez Catheron—*come home*!"

"Yes, she has escaped from the madhouse to which your confederates consigned her, and if out of the wreck of our happiness you hope to pluck one glimmer of your—your husband's respect, I charge you to tell me all!"

"Or if not to him, to me, my poor girl," murmured Inez, gliding forward and facing her—"tell it to me, whom you so terribly wronged, and perhaps the word forgiveness may be spoken between us."

With such a cry as only they can give who feel that they have been suddenly lifted out of darkness into light, Zillah sat up and reached forth her clasped hands.

"You are alive—you are alive—thank God for that!" she cried. "They told me you were dead, Miss Catheron; but now that you are living, even though my sin has found me out, I can say, 'Thank God!' with all my heart. Oh, Alaric! Alaric!"—she slipped down from the rustic bench as she spoke, and fell upon her knees before him—"forgive me for the wrong I have done you, and remember, when you hear my story, that I was tempted to sin only because I loved you, my darling. I am not fit to be your wife, for you are noble, and I—forgive me—forgive me—I am a nameless vagabond, born and bred—a gypsy!"

"A gypsy!"

For a moment his lordship seemed stunned by her admission; for a moment he stood, with bowed face and clinched hands; and when, at length, he lifted his head, she saw that there were tears in his eyes.

"And being Zillah, the gypsy," he said, hoarsely, "how can you be wife of mine? The peculiar form of marriage which obtains among the people of your race is recognized as legal by the crown, and, if you were once the wife of this man Jock, your second union—your union with me—would be illegal."

"My Heaven! what are you saying?" she broke in, hoarsely. "My second union! Ah! Alaric, Alaric! who has been telling you this dreadful thing? I never was Jock's wife—never was anything more to him than Miss Catheron herself!"

"My God! and *she* said—Lady Blanche said—that you and he——"

A spasm seemed to ring away his voice. He faced about abruptly, and so confronted Jock.

"If there is one spark of manhood in you, I appeal to it!" he cried. "Which of these two women have spoken the truth?"

Jock lifted his haggard face, and his lordship could see that there was something glistening on his lashes.

"You needn't ask it, for Zillah never lied," he an-

swered. "It was all the doing of that she-devil there, and I've known it ever since the moment when I learned that Zillah was your wife. Marco and his daughter led me to believe that Zillah was living in shame, not in wifehood, Lord Keith, and—and after that I'd only one thought: to have your life for the wrong done her."

"Oh, devil—devil! what punishment is bad enough for you?" exclaimed his lordship, glancing at Lady Blanche. "Forgive me—forgive me, that I doubted you, *Zillah*, and let me thank God that my shame has nothing deeper than the knowledge that my wife is a gypsy."

"And such a shame that woman planned for you, Alaric," responded Zillah, sorrowfully. "I never knew it until it was too late; I never fully realized what a curse my love had been to you until it was past undoing. I was tempted, Alaric—tempted beyond my strength—because I loved you so; and, although my degraded origin must forever stand as a barrier between us, I think you will pity me when you have heard my miserable story."

And with that brief preface, she told it—from the beginning to this, the sorrowful ending—just as we have lived it with her, and so, for the first time, his lordship learned what a foe he had made that night at Carn Ruth.

"I have paid you well for your scorn and contempt, haven't I, Keith?" laughed Lady Blanche, when the recital was ended. "I swore I would, and you see I have kept my word! How does it feel, my friend, to be the husband of a low-lived gypsy! How does it feel, Keith, to know that your child will have for its mother a woman for whose origin it must always blush? Oh, you fool! oh, you fool! do you think you can realize at last how a woman *hates*?"

"If I cannot"—my lord lifted his head as he spoke, and his face was as white as death—"if I cannot, you monster, at least I *can* realize how a man *loves*, and, gypsy though she is, this woman is my wife—the queen of my heart—the sharer of my name, as she henceforth shall be, the sharer of my sorrows and my joys. You have kept your promise, and I will keep mine. When I took her to my heart, I swore to love and cherish her, swore to cleave to her, though all the world beside forsook her; and now, with love to smooth it, that will not be a vow too hard to keep. Zillah, my queen, my gypsy wife, our lives must never go astray, no matter *what* you are. Come to me, dear; come to me and love me, and be my own forever!"

So speaking, he opened wide his arms, and she, creeping into them, knew that his love stood by her, even though his pride was slain.

"Oh, Alaric, I am not worthy of this, but I shall try to be, my husband, through all the years to come!" she softly murmured.

"Angels can do no more, my wife!" he answered, as he bent and kissed her. "'Love rules the world, and 'tis worth the world to win it!' You are mine to have and to hold, and hold you I will forever, my Zillah, my wife, my 'Flower of the Forest!'"

"So you remember the picture still, Alaric? Ah! now that I am blessed beyond recall, I can confess the truth. It all happened, Alaric, just as that artist told you. Mine was the face he saw—mine, and not Miss Catheron's—and I wore that velvet mask because I was always held as something sacred among the gypsies, who regarded it as profanation if any but a Romany should look upon my face.

"I was known among them as Zillah the Spirit Child, and the title was given me because it was said that I died in my infancy, and my soul had been placed in a new body, in answer to my mother's prayers. I have always doubted the story, because it would be almost paganism to believe it.

"It was said to have happened just twenty years ago, Alaric. My parents, or, at least, my reputed parents, who were known by the names of Taric and Starlight Bess, were then in America, searching for the whereabouts of a woman named Hulda Talford (or Hulda the Weasel, as she was known among the gypsies), who had lately succeeded to the Romany throne.

"They had failed to find her, and were on their way back to England, when this supposed miracle was said to have been performed.

"A child had been born to them while on their journey, and, either through neglect or exposure, that child died in its mother's arms, and she, poor creature, would not consent to abandon its little body, but continued to hold it against her bosom while she tramped along.

"It was a stormy February night, and the sleet was driving fast. Taric and Starlight Bess, who were trying their best to reach a place called Pittsburgh, where they were to take the train for New York, were walking along by the banks of a river, and had just reached a town called Alleghany City, when——"

"Alleghany City! Alleghany City! Oh, my Heaving, my Heaving! I ain't a-dreamin' it—I hain't a-dreamin' it arter all."

The voice was Martha Boggs', and as she spoke, that worthy person bristled forward, and pausing before Zillah,

lifted a dead white face and stared at her with two big, dilated eyes.

"Oh, if it should be—my Lork a massy, if it should be!" she gasped, excitedly. "Go on, mum—I mean your ladyship—go on and tell the rest. It was in Alleghany City on a stormy night in February twenty years ago—— Go on, go on. Oh, please, go on!"

"There is little enough to tell, Martha—only it was said that life was suddenly restored to that dead child, and whether the story is true or false, Starlight Bess brought the little one to England, and ever afterward it was known as Zillah, the Spirit Child. The gypsies accepted the story in good faith, but as for me, I have always thought that if I could trace my life back to that eventful seventeenth of February——"

"The seventeenth of February!" shrieked Martha, excitedly, "the seventeenth of February, and she's the livin' picture o' Miss Inez. The seventeenth o' February, twenty years ago——"

She paused abruptly, wavered a moment, and then, beating her way through the crowd, paused before Maverick Narkland.

"Don't you know me, Mr. Narkland?" she panted. "Don't you know Martha Boggs, as Lady Morford was good enough to keep as nurse for the baby as she fetched to Lord Glandore? Don't you recollect that, sir, and don't you recollect about *the other*? Oh, sir, it's time for both of us to break that promise as we give to Lady Morford—it's time for us to tell about the little one as Hulda Talford stole. Look at her—look at Lord Keith's wife and say if it ain't!"

"In the name of Heaven, Boggs, what has come over *you*?" exclaimed Lord Glandore. "Have you taken to drink in your old age, or has this night unsettled what few wits you have?"

"I don't know. I can't think o' anything 'cept that it's time to tell, and tell I will, no matter what happens!" responded she, excitedly. "Oh, my lord, and oh, Miss Inez, I've been a-keepin' a miserable secret all these years. You come into this world on the seventeenth o' February, twenty years ago—come into the world at Alleghany City, and—and you didn't come alone, my lambie. There was twins born—twin girls—and one o' them was hooked by Hulda Talford, which Mr. Narkland will bear me out!"

And then, what need to record it?—she fell upon her knees at Inez Catheron's feet and told the story of that double birth, and why the secret was kept.

"You're *sisters*, I know you're sisters," she concluded.

"You could never be so much alike unless you were. Oh, tell 'em it's true, Mr. Narkland, tell 'em it's true, I beg o' you."

"It is true," responded Maverick Narkland; "and from the moment I first saw these two girls I have felt sure that they were sisters."

Then plunging into the story he told it in a plain, straightforward way, that carried conviction to all who heard.

"Sisters!" exclaimed Zillah, turning to Inez and holding out her arms. "Oh, Miss Catheron, are we that? Is it possible that we can be that? Ah, if it *could* be true, I would give the world to know it! Oh, Alarie, oh, my husband, I should be free of every stain if this were true! Can we do nothing to discover it?"

"Yes," he answered, quickly, "if Lady Blanche is what Boggs proclaimed her awhile ago—the granddaughter of Hulda Talford—we can either buy the truth from *her*, or go to America and trace it out. Speak, Lady Blanche! Will you sell it at the price of your freedom? If we promise not to prosecute either you or your father for this conspiracy, will you confess—if you know anything regarding Zillah's parentage?"

For a moment Lady Blanche wavered; then, as she glanced up and caught the signal which her father gave her:

"Yes," she answered, sullenly. "If Lord Glandore will promise to let us both free, and never expose my share in this conspiracy, I'll tell what I know."

"I give you my promise!" responded his lordship.

"Sacredly?"

"Yes, sacredly. Men, release them both. There! are you satisfied? Now speak! What—if anything—do you know of this girl?"

"Enough to prove the truth of what Boggs suspects!" returned her ladyship, sullenly. "Zillah is the missing twin and she is Inez Catheron's sister!"

CHAPTER LXI.

"BUT TIME AT LAST MAKES ALL THINGS EVEN."

As she spoke, she turned toward the open doorway, but ere she reached it:

"One moment!" exclaimed Mr. Narkland, as he stepped forward. "Before you complete that *affectionate* farewell by taking your departure, I should like to show you something, Miss Maggie Talford!"

"What do you mean sir? I am Lady Blanche Hay!"

"Pardon me, you only think that, and the thing I have to show you, will, I trust, convince you that you're terribly mistaken. Take it and look at it, Miss Talford. It is a paper restraining you from touching the late Lord Norris Hay's estate or moneys until such time as you shall prove your right thereto. And you can't prove it, Miss Talford, simply because the late Lord Hay had a living wife at the time he married you!"

"It's a lie!"

"Ah, no it isn't, my sweet little devil, it's the truth. I have a sick client stopping at the Leith Arms, who has in her possession a paper which certifies that she was united in marriage to Lord Norris Hay eleven years ago, and although that precious rascal deserted her in Australia and thought he was done with her forever, that doesn't alter the fact that she is still living and will not leave England until she gets every penny that is due her. Good-night, now, if it suits you, Miss Talford. I'm afraid that you are in a bad box."

And so she was, for before Mr. Narkland returned to America, he not only had the satisfaction of recovering the Hay estates for his client, but the happiness of knowing that its former incumbent had been obliged to cast her lot with her father's and become, like him, a vagabond gypsy.

This fate, however, did not befall poor, deluded Jock; for, having become joint heiress in the Catheron estate, Zillah was enabled to furnish him with sufficient money to accompany Mr. Narkland to America, and there, in the Far West, to establish a cattle ranch.

But this—although, perhaps, necessary—is certainly a digression.

Not until *Miss Talford* and her estimable papa had taken their departure upon the memorable night whose events I have been so long recording, did anything like order come out of the confusion which reigned supreme; and then, finding her way to that part of the conservatory where Robert Herndon stood alone, Miss Catheron looked up into

his pale, handsome face with a smile of happiness and triumph.

"Whose was the 'delusion,' Robert?" she smilingly said. "You doubted my sanity, but whose was the delusion, after all?"

"Mine!" he answered, huskily. "I see it plainly enough now; mine was the delusion, and, oh! it was so sweet."

"How sorrowfully you say that," she answered, dropping her eyes, and trying hard to manage the treacherous color that would rise over her face. "Are you not happy, Robert, to find me *not* insane? But there! let us not talk of that; it brings back memories of the dear little villa in Paris, which made me so sad at parting. Besides, you must be very tired after our long journey, and you cannot care to talk to-night. To-morrow, after you have rested, we shall have such a long, long chat about those pleasant times in Paris."

"To-morrow is the fool's paradise, Miss Catheron, and—— Will you be angry, I wonder, if I seem discourteous? I have already arranged with my mother to return to London to-night."

"To-night, Robert? Oh, are we, then, so inhospitable that you are in haste to leave us? When we left Paris, you promised that—that in case I failed to prove myself what I claimed to be, you would spend some days in Kent, making sketches and showing me the sights."

"But you have not failed," he answered huskily. "The promise and the hope—— Oh, Inez, my love! my life, the hope lived only in your failure, and it dies in your success. You were to be my wife if I proved that you were *not* Inez Catheron. You gave your promise only that way, dear, and now that you have succeeded——"

She dropped her lovely blushing face, and shyly slid her hand in his.

"Now that I have succeeded, why not make me keep it, Robert, to pay you for your trouble?" she softly said.

"Inez!" in a voice of sudden rapture. "My Heaven! am I mad or dreaming? Oh, be kind or cruel in a single word, my love! Is it 'go' or is it 'stay'?"

"Stay, Robert, stay!" she softly murmured. "I have learned to know the difference between a girlish fancy and a woman's love, and it is stay, Robert—stay forever. It will be a blank without you!"

"My darling! my darling!" he uttered as he took her in his arms. "Sweet, do you love me after all?"

"Not after all, but *before* all, Robert!" she answered, naively. "Lady Blanche's 'revenge' has been a blessing, for it has taught me, dear——"

"What, Inez—what?"

"That I should have grown tired of Alaric, but of you, ah! never, Robert! never, for I love you with all my heart!"

What answer Robert Herndon made, none but she might know, for he whispered it as he took her to his heart, and held her there, as he held her ever after, and so, like this—in perfect peace—and perfect love for these two sisters—the vengeance of Lady Blanche found its fated issue, and the story of their sorrows ended "forever and for aye."

[THE END.]



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Eva, the Adventuress.

By NELLIE BLY.

Author of "Ten Days in a Madhouse," "The Mystery of Central Park," etc., etc.

At 9:30 o'clock of the morning of November 14th last, as is now known all the world over, a slight, slender girl, barely out of her teens, with bright, flashing brown eyes and black hair, her *petite* figure one mass of energy and pluck, and her face expressive of grim determination, started from New York to make a trip around the world in seventy-five days or less.

That girl, the embodiment of all that is fearless and self-reliant, that is attractive and lovable in the American female character, was Nellie Bly. Commissioned by the most enterprising of the great metropolitan dailies, the *New York World*, to convert what had been a mere imagining of Jules Verne's fervid fancy into an actual reality, this young girl, unaccompanied by any escort or chaperon, with no more baggage than a hand-sachel, started out to traverse the great Atlantic, to fly by rail across the continent of Europe, to make the passage of the Mediterranean Sea, thence through Asia across the Indian Ocean, to China and Japan, thence by way of the Pacific Ocean, and across the great American Continent back to home. Altogether a distance of 30,000 miles. The itinerary she has set out to accomplish is as follows:

- Nov. 14. Leave New York by Augusta Victoria 9.30 A. M.
- Nov. 21. Due Southampton. London, by rail in three hours.
- Nov. 22. Leave Victoria Station, London, 8 P. M. on India Mail.
- Nov. 23. Calais, Paris and Turin.
- Nov. 24. Brindisi at 10.14 P. M.
- Nov. 25. Leave Brindisi, steamship Cathay, 2 A. M.
- Nov. 27. Ismailia.
- Dec. 3. Aden.
- Dec. 10. Colombo (Ceylon).
- Dec. 16. Penang.
- Dec. 18. Singapore.
- Dec. 25. Hong Kong.
- Dec. 28. Leave Hong Kong for Yokohama, Japan.
- Jan. 7. Leave Yokohama via Pacific Mail steamship.
- Jan. 22. Due San Francisco.
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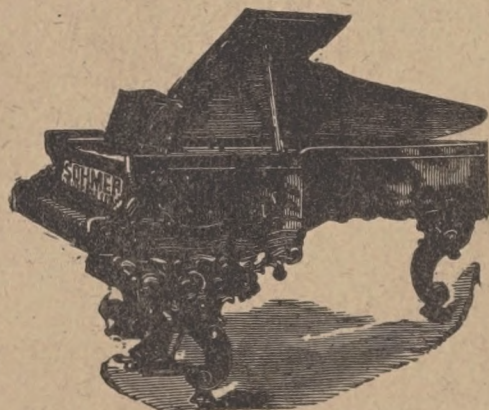
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